



Daily News

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## UNIZULU adopts hybrid mode of teaching and learning

NALEDI HLEFANE

IT'S the dawn of a new era for the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) following its decision to now employ a hybrid teaching and learning practice.

The university welcomed back its full complement of academic staff and students to the KwaDlangezwa and Richards Bay campuses earlier this month, and is looking forward to a safe and prosperous year.

Professor Vuyokazi Nomlomo, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, explained that the migration to a hybrid teaching and learning format was inspired by a few factors, including the current Alert Level 1 status of the SA lockdown, which allows for more population movement and interaction.

Bearing this crucial fact in mind, Prof Nomlomo said the institution's executive committee met early this year to discuss the re-introduction of face-to-face teaching and learning to enhance students' learning and their experience at university, after the past two life-changing years.

"We don't want to throw away the skills we acquired from teaching with technologies. We can't compromise on that. Instead, we want to build on that and make things even better. The plan is to have a hybrid mode of learning, with



It's the dawn of a new era for UNIZULU as the university adopts a hybrid teaching and learning model.

face-to-face engagements as well as an online component. We want to give more opportunities of success to our students. We plan to record our lectures and make them available online so that anytime our students want to go back to access a particular lecture at their own time and space, they can do so easily," said Prof Nomlomo.

The institution has taken some strides towards bolstering the online aspect of teaching and learning, ahead of the return of academic staff and students. It purchased and installed interactive screens

in 2021 in identified areas within each of the four faculties. "Each faculty has two interactive screens at the moment, and we intend to purchase more so that they can be installed in each and every lecture hall," Prof Nomlomo confirmed. The institution has also upgraded its official online learning platform, Moodle, to ensure that it functions optimally both during the hybrid teaching and learning phase as well as for full-time online learning, in the event of another hard lockdown.

Even with the entire UNIZULU pop-

ulation being on campus again, Prof Nomlomo stressed that the university is determined to ensure that strict Covid-19 precautions are always adhered to.

### ASPIRATIONS FOR 2022 ACADEMIC YEAR

Reflecting on the past two years of remote learning, Prof Nomlomo said she was extremely proud of how diligently and selflessly academic staff had performed, as well as of the dedication of the students. Her hope is that 2022 will be a vibrant, intellectually engaging and successful year.

"I hope the infection rate will decrease, as this will give us more liberty to actively engage with students so that they can have meaningful learning. I wish staff a successful 2022. I know that they will explore opportunities to grow and do even better than what they have been doing in the past two years, as (new) technology is emerging every day. As an institution, we have an obligation to explore those opportunities for our staff. As much as we say no student must be left behind, we must do the same for our staff. We will continue training and supporting them."

Prof Nomlomo concluded by urging the UNIZULU community to consider getting vaccinated so that there could be free interaction among each other.

## Former top matriculant credits her grandparents for success

JAMES THWALA

A SUPPORTIVE and loving family is among the best things a person can hope for. Sethabile Ngobese, a self-proclaimed kind and helpful 21-year-old, feels blessed to have been born into such a family.

Ngobese grew up in KwaDlangezwa, Empangeni in a big family that included her mother, uncles, siblings, cousins and late grandparents, whom she regards as her mentors.

Ngobese's high school story was mostly characterised by setbacks. In 2018, she looked forward to completing her matric at Dlangezwa High School. However, her hopes were later crushed when she found out she had failed.

Despondency overwhelmed her from that point on. If it was not for her grandparents, Ngobese would not have a matric certificate today. Feeling concerned about their granddaughter's future, her grandparents sat her down and encouraged her to go back to school because she was still young.

"After that chat with my late grandparents, I didn't care what people had to say about me," Ngobese said. She suddenly realised that the onus lay with her to ensure a bright future for herself.

In 2019, Ngobese mustered the courage to register at Qhakaza High School, where she started afresh in Grade 10. The years 2019 and 2020 were very stressful, because she lost both her grandparents. Losing her mentors was a turning point for her, and she shifted her focus to her studies and excelled in her grandparents' honour.



Gritty and determined Sethabile Ngobese is a few years away from realising her childhood dream of becoming a lawyer.

"Time was of the essence. I avoided procrastinating and did every school task the best way I could." This worked in her favour, as she passed matric with top marks.

Resolving to redo her senior school years was a tough yet rewarding decision. She met amazing teachers who assisted her every step of the way. She also acknowledges her friend and some family members who were supportive right through to the moment where she completed her registration for the Bachelor of Laws degree at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

Ngobese was drawn to the legal field because her uncle, who is a lawyer, used to talk so fondly about the profession. When she told him she was considering taking the legal route after high school, there were no objections from his side.

## Aspiring legal practitioner now a UNIZULU law student

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE UNIZULU Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law has gained a diligent Bachelor of Laws student in Mandisa Ntombela. Hailing from KwaMaphumulo, she matriculated from Siyamukela High School in Newcastle, and is both eager and uneasy about what 2022 has in store for her.

Growing up, Ntombela aspired to become a doctor. "When I got to Grade 10, one of my teachers convinced me to join the Moot Court. Moot Court is a competition which aims to create greater awareness in schools and communities in South Africa about the constitution and the values that it embodies through active participation. The aim is also to encourage talented young people to consider pursuing a law career. That is when I realised that I had a talent and I don't fear public speaking," Ntombela explained.

In participating in the competition, Ntombela reached provincial level and went as far as representing KwaZulu-Na-



Bachelor of Laws student Mandisa Ntombela is following in her brothers' footsteps and wants to surpass them by becoming chief justice of the country.

tal nationally. They had to argue their case. The question before the court was whether the application of section 23 and 24 of the school's code of conduct is

unconstitutional and violates the applicant's right to basic education, and the right to freedom of religion, belief, and opinion. They also worked on written submissions.

According to Ntombela, the preparation was gruelling. "We had to research various cases and international instruments that were relevant to the hypothetical case. In terms of the oral submissions, we had many drilling sessions with the Moot society and our coach to prepare."

Ntombela's family pride themselves in already having two lawyers in the family. Her elder brothers were highly influential in her choosing the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) as her gateway to the legal world.

"My one brother is now an advocate. He studied at this very institution. My other brother is an attorney. My dream is to become chief justice one day. I just want to go all the way," a confident Ntombela said.

UNIZULU lecturer in the law department, Michael Buthelezi met Ntombela

at the Moot competition and recruited her to join the university.

Buthelezi said he wishes Ntombela well in her studies. He has no doubt that her future in law is bright, due to her family background of having two lawyers already and having the foundation of law laid out two years ago, while still in school.

"I wish more learners could receive such training if they want to pursue law upon completion of school. Ntombela tried to run away to 'Tarshish' like Biblical Jonah, but she did not succeed. Lo and behold, she is here, and I am very excited. She will add value to our teams that we will send out to Moot competitions," Buthelezi said.

As far as Ntombela is concerned, she is prepared to tackle every argument in any court as this will get her a few steps closer to reaching her goal of becoming chief justice of the country.

"It is very important to me that I use my skills to help heal the world of the many injustices that exist," she said.

## Resolute about excelling in her studies

NALEDI HLEFANE

AMANDA Dlamini, a resolute 22-year-old from Mondlo township in Vryheid, quickly discovered that keeping one's eye on the prize is the secret to succeeding in life.

Dlamini implemented this strategy throughout her high school journey, and it proved effective every single time. The same practice saw her attaining four distinctions in matric and no less than 70% in her other four subjects.

Recalling her experience, she shared that her journey was not without hardships. "My matric year was the most challenging year for me compared to the previous years in high school. I was not staying at home; I had to rent because my school was far from home."

Dlamini said she did not come from a rich family, and there were times when her single mother struggled to buy enough food. She recollected the days when she would even go to school on an empty stomach.

Amid these struggles, Dlamini was not deterred. Instead, she studied harder. Having a strong support system also played a pivotal role in her achievement. She feels indebted to her mother, two younger

siblings, maternal uncle and educators for their unwavering love and backing. Their efforts, coupled with Dlamini's dedication, made it possible for her to attain the excellent results that secured her a place to study at her dream university - the University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

Dlamini's initial choice of study was psychology, however, she missed the opportunity to study towards this qualification because the programme reached its capacity before her application was reviewed. She then opted to enrol for a BCom Human Resource Management degree - a suited career choice seeing as her strongest traits include interacting with and assisting people. She also describes herself as a calm and confident person who seeks to solve problems - characteristics which come highly recommended for people in her field.

On her approach to university academics, Dlamini said she will revert to her tried and tested strategy.

"Hard work pays. So, I am still going to work hard so that I can continue with the good results," she said.

Not one to shy away from seeking help, she intends to make use of any academic support structures available for students on campus.

## 'SASSA grant helped me become a top achiever in my municipality'

SAMKELE SOKHELA

US politician Bill Bradley once said, "ambition is the path to success and persistence is the vehicle you arrive in," - and former top achiever Banele Buthelezi is living proof of this.

Born and raised in the rural area of eNgodlomezi, Mpumalanga, the 19-year-old is a 2021 matriculant who now studies at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU). He is studying towards a Bachelor of Engineering in Mechanical Engineering. Buthelezi says discipline, hard work and determination were the keys to unlocking his laudable achievement of 42 points.

Despite a challenging year of schools opening and closing due to Covid-19, Buthelezi accomplished the unimaginable in his matric year. He obtained Level 7 in all his subjects, including an astounding 100% pass in both mathematics and physical sciences. His impressive achievement saw him being recently recognised by Chief Albert Luthuli Municipality as its top achiever.



Newly-registered Bachelor of Engineering in Mechanical Engineering student, Banele Buthelezi.

Reaching this milestone did not come easy for Buthelezi, who had to grapple with a difficult social challenge. His family of six lives in a two-bedroom house, and the only sources of income were the SASSA social grant and proceeds from his

mother's vending business that operated from the gate of his high school. His family's economic status made him a constant target for his schoolmates' jokes.

"To be honest, I am proud of myself. I never expected such results, but I guess with determination and a positive attitude everything is possible. I worked hard - and believe me when I say it was not easy. My peers would make jokes that my family and I survived through selling snacks at school," said Buthelezi.

He explained that having no decent income at home to support him, particularly his education and siblings, had an impact on his schooling.

"Fortunately, that did not stop me from attaining the results I challenged myself to accomplish," he said.

He admitted that obtaining 42 points would not have been possible had it not been for the after-school extra classes he attended, the support of his mathematics and physical sciences educator, Emmanuella Sengwayo and his family's constant motivation.

"Joining after-school classes played a significant role during my matric. I liked the classes because I took them as a second opportunity for me to revisit my coursework; sections I needed to get clarity on and then improve so that I could do well."

Buthelezi said the classes were extremely beneficial and at the same time costly, as he had to pay R50 a week per subject. However, with a strong desire to study and a full understanding of his family's finances, he did not ask for money from his family. Instead, he used his social grant to pay for extra classes and it paid off. Buthelezi is now a student at a university that is close to his heart.

Elaborating on his decision to register for mechanical engineering, the aspiring engineer said he has always been fascinated by machine manufacturing, engineering designs, production, and the operation of machinery.

Buthelezi is proud of his journey thus far and is looking forward to his time at UNIZULU.



Newly-registered BCom Human Resource Management student, Amanda Dlamini is ready to hit the ground running.

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