

# ONGOYE TERTIARY TIMES

## UNIZULU and partners launch MANDELA

PRECIOUS SHAMASE AND NALEDI HLEFANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU), in collaboration with the universities of the Western Cape (UWC) and York in the United Kingdom, has launched the Modern African Nuclear Detector Laboratory (MANDELA).

The main aim of MANDELA is to upskill students in the partner universities in the areas of nuclear medical imaging, nuclear application and environmental studies.

According to Professor Sifiso Ntshangase, the UNIZULU principal investigator in the project, the University of York has made "great strides in nuclear application studies like detector development and medical imaging". He added that UNIZULU's Department of Physics had already gained much from the expertise of Professor David Jenkins, who heads the nuclear-physics group at the University of York.

"Already, the University of Zululand is engaging other stakeholders like Kwa-Zulu-Natal hospitals to be involved in the research in medical imaging. Furthermore, Richards Bay is dominated by a number of industries doing a lot of activities that result in significant pollution. These include mining industries.



The University of Zululand, together with the universities of the Western Cape and York, recently hosted a hybrid event to launch the Modern African Nuclear Detector Laboratory (MANDELA).

The MANDELA project will assist in conducting environmental studies in the Richards Bay area. This will help supple-

ment the work currently undertaken by the Richards Bay Clean Air Association, which is the only independent associa-

tion doing the measurement in the area," Prof Ntshangase explained.

He added that the project has helped supplement the Department of Physics's postgraduate studies programme. Students are now able to do projects on campus, unlike before where they would have to do research in the research facilities at iThemba LABS in Cape Town.

MANDELA contains equipment funded by the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) project called NuTRAIN, and is led by Professor Jenkins.

While extending his congratulatory message, Professor Tyrone Pretorius, Rector and Vice Chancellor of UWC, noted that this project symbolises how the two respective institutions have stepped out of the shadow of the past and taken their place as leading institutions. "This is a wonderful event for UWC and its partners, the universities of York and Zululand. Out of this we will have state-of-the-art laboratories. The realisation of these laboratories speaks to many values that are important to us: the growth of UWC, offering our students a chance to do research at a world-class facility, and strengthening our partnerships with local and interna-

tional institutions. Moreover, this signals a momentous occasion for two South African universities, as they are both historically disadvantaged institutions and were both incidentally established in 1960," he said.

Echoing these sentiments, Professor Nokuthula Kunene, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation, acknowledged Prof Ntshangase, Prof Jenkins and Prof Nico Orce of UWC for their commendable efforts in the project. She spoke about how the development of MANDELA has led to some UNIZULU students obtaining training on radiation detectors and computer simulation at an international level.

"We really appreciate the good work that (the professors) have done. This is a huge accomplishment for us as South African universities. It is exciting that UNIZULU is part of this initiative, but more importantly, that students will be involved in these experiments. It has been indicated that these projects are yielding the expected results," she said.

Each of the speakers who took to the stand expressed their shared excitement about the impactful collaboration, the facilities, and the opportunities that will be created for talented students to fulfil their ambitions in nuclear physics.

### 'Smart Justice' - UNIZULU hosts webinar on trio crimes in KZN

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

A RECENT webinar hosted by UNIZULU's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences brought together academics from various disciplines to discuss the issue of trio crimes in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).

Presented by Professor Jean Steyn, Head of the Department of Criminal Justice, the webinar was titled "Smart Justice: A Durban NPA Cluster Trio Crime Investigation and Prosecution Initiative Case Study".

Unpacking the topic, Prof Steyn explained that the phenomenon of trio crimes encompasses three categories of crime: house robberies, business robberies and vehicle robberies. "According to the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) report of 2019 and 2020, these are the crimes that South Africans fear the most. Over the last five years, trio crimes have decreased nationally. However, in the Kwa-Zulu-Natal Province (these seem to have) increased. On average, in KZN, we record two household robberies, two business robberies and two vehicle robberies every hour," Prof Steyn said.

His research was focused on the Durban cluster of the NPA, which achieves a high conviction rate despite utilising the same resources as its national counterparts. Prof Steyn sought to discover what the cluster does differently to achieve 14% more cases being addressed in court and a higher conviction rate.

According to Prof Steyn, it took some introspection for the cluster to reach its current state. Before, the cluster struggled to meet an 85% yearly trio crime conviction rate, due to overburdened prosecutors working in silos. From the self-reflection, the cluster established a vision and a sense of purpose. After an analysis, the cluster was commended for mentoring, conducting prosecutor guided investigation, having a determined attitude and going the extra mile. However, there is, with any progressive endeavour, room for improvement.

Similar to previous ceremonies, these ones promise to be nothing short of exciting and inspiring, with two honorary recipients and high-profile guest speakers addressing the granduands.

The NPA Durban cluster trio crime initiative, extrapolated by Prof Steyn's impactful research, is seen as an operational model of excellence, and is currently being implemented by the NPA, nationally.

Three respondents from different disciplines shared their perspectives on the topic.

Prof John Rautenbach, Head of the Department of Social Work, said the issues of fear and safety that were alluded to in the main presentation reminded him of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. "We want to feel safe and we want to feel secure, and Prof Steyn started off his presentation by saying these are the crimes that are feared the most. When someone violates our personal space, it disrupts our lives. We applaud the research done by Prof Steyn and wish that more crime would end up in court," he said.

Dr Simangele Cele, Head of the Department of Sociology offered a different view, saying family dynamics is another angle worth considering when looking at the perpetrators of crime. "One needs to look at the structure and context of families, whether a structure may contribute to a dysfunctional family," she said. In her opinion, a well-knitted family breeds a well-knitted society that yields to social being. Crimes emanate from various reasons, she said. Dr Cele added that migration could possibly be among the reasons for the high trio crime rate, as Prof Steyn's study was based on a Durban case.

Delivering the final response, Dr Vusi Mathe from the Department of Psychology delved into the multiple social ills currently facing KZN; elaborating on the role psychology can play in police investigations. "These trio crimes are a major problem. The victims and their families need counselling. The role of a social psychologist (could be useful during) police investigation (in terms of) how the questions should be asked," Dr Mathe said.



Professor Jean Steyn, Head of the Department of Criminal Justice, recently presented a case study on trio crimes in KZN.

## 2022 UNIZULU GRADUATION

THE elation is almost tangible as the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) welcomes back the much-missed and highly desired physical graduation ceremonies, and bids farewell to the previous virtual and hybrid formats in 2020 and 2021, respectively.

The institution is eagerly awaiting the various dance celebrations on and off-stage, the ululations of guests as graduates descend the stage, and the tears of joy that have become synonymous with this blissful period of the year.

The 2022 graduation ceremonies are scheduled to commence on Monday, May 9 and conclude on Friday, May 13. A total of 10 sessions will be held, with two taking place daily.

More than 3 700 granduands will receive their qualifications over the course of the five days. Twenty eight percent (28%) of these qualifications will be conferred on Faculty of Education granduands, 27% on Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (previously Faculty of Arts) granduands and 26% on Faculty of

Commerce, Administration and Law granduands. Some 19% of the qualifications will be awarded to the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering cohort.

Among these granduands are 59 who have distinguished themselves through the course of their studies by attaining notable results. Their degrees will be awarded with distinction.

The Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law's Bachelor of Commerce degree has the greatest number of completions, with 244 granduands. It is

followed by the Bachelor of Arts Development Studies degree in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, which has 168 granduands. In the Faculty of Education, 148 granduands will be receiving the Bachelor of Education (Intermediate Phase: Language & Humanities) qualification. Meanwhile, in the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering, the Bachelor of Science (Biochemistry and Microbiology) is leading with 60 degree recipients.

Where gender is concerned, women

are in the lead once again this season, making up 71% of those set to receive their hard-earned qualifications.

The university is also delighted to have contributed towards the academic journeys of 17 international students who will obtain their degrees in the upcoming graduation period.

Similar to previous ceremonies, these ones promise to be nothing short of exciting and inspiring, with two honorary recipients and high-profile guest speakers addressing the granduands.



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# Top research rating for UNIZULU professor

NALEDI HLEFANE

CONSISTENCY in producing quality research with relevance to the field of social work has earned Prof Allucia Lulu Shokane – a Full Professor of Social Work at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) – a C3 rating by the National Research Foundation (NRF).

This milestone comes as a result of an application made by Prof Shokane in February 2021, the outcome of which was revealed earlier this month. Based on her portfolio, NRF has pronounced Prof Shokane an established researcher with a sustained recent record of productivity in the field. According to NRF, the scholar is recognised by her peers as having produced a body of quality work, the core of which has coherence and attests to ongoing engagement with the field. Her peers also recognise her for her demonstrated ability to conceptualise problems and apply research methods to investigating them.

Delighted and grateful for the recognition, Prof Shokane said: "I was excited and at the same time, humbled after receiving such news. Humbled, remembering where I am coming from – novelty as a researcher and the hardships that I had to endure. I must admit, this has been a journey."

It is surprising that this now prolific scholar never even considered becoming a researcher at the start of her career. She owes her success to various academics with whom she has worked and been mentored by, both in South Africa and abroad.

"I had to focus and persevere as I went along. One thing that helped me was to not close my walls within the field of social work, but open myself to broader ideas, views and perspectives in the broader fields of humanities and social sciences. For example, I became



Professor Allucia Lulu Shokane is humbled by her recent rating as a C3 researcher by the National Research Foundation. She pledges to continue publishing, so as to leave her mark across the globe and improve her rating.

interested in discussions and debates on social work, climate change and disaster management," Prof Shokane shared. She added that she used Africanism, indigenous knowledge systems and decoloniality concepts to frame her work in research and writing.

The professor has joined a handful of black African women who have achieved an established researcher rating. While this reality adds sentimental value to her accomplishment, Prof Shokane feels that it also places her in a challenging position of having to meet high expectations in her field. Nevertheless, the self-proclaimed challenge-seeker is determined to exceed these expectations.

"I aim to maintain my momentum and ensure that I remain counted in the field. I plan to improve my rating and lead internationally in the field. Going forward, I wish to continue working

with my co-researchers in developing and advancing an Afro-sensed theory and perspectives, while problematising local indigenous community and social work research in knowledge pathing: multi, inter and trans-disciplining in social sciences series as part of AOSIS publishers," she said.

## CAREER

Prof Shokane's career has been marked by many achievements. She made her debut in the social work sector in 2006, under the employ of the Department of Social Development in the Mopani District of Limpopo.

By 2012, she had risen through the ranks – from social worker to Senior Social Worker, Principal and Supervisor Social Worker – to Sub-District Head. She thereafter shifted to academia, starting as a lecturer at the University of Venda in 2012. In 2019, she joined UNIZULU as Head of the Department of Social Work. She was subsequently promoted to acting Deputy Dean: Research, Innovation and Internationalisation in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in 2021.

In addition to her NRF rating, Prof Shokane also serves as a regional mentor for the National Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) funded doctoral students in KwaZulu-Natal, responsible for UNIZULU and the Durban University Technology.

Furthermore, as part of the Women Researchers in Humanities and Social Sciences (WORHSS) project within her faculty, she undertakes mentorship and coaching roles. The plan is to focus on enhancing the research of women academics and improving their research outputs.

She also served as Vice-President of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) between 2019 and 2022.

## Professor Siphon Seepe is flying the UNIZULU flag high

GCINA NHLEKO

WHEN Professor Siphon Seepe was appointed as Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Institutional Support in 2019, he had a clear vision for UNIZULU. This was to facilitate strategic conversations and ensure that people talk about what matters, which is the vision and strategic intent for UNIZULU.

Prof Seepe ultimately has made a demonstrable change through proven consistent achievements as a credible voice on behalf of the institution. Therefore, his latest nominations to serve on the Provincial Growth and Investment Council in the Northern Cape, and to participate in the State of the Province (SOPA) round table discussions are befitting.

The Northern Cape's Provincial Growth and Development Plan (PGDP) – Vision 2040 and the Provincial Spatial Development Framework (PSDF) are 20-year plans striving for a modern, growing and successful province – and are at the apex of the provincial research agenda. The Integrated Governance, Co-ordination and Service Delivery (IGCSD) model emanates from the PGDP, which is aimed at improving state-society relations and service delivery in order to build better communities. Professor Seepe's expertise will assist in the mapping of the Northern Cape's PGDP-Vision 2040 and the PSDF plans.

Professor Seepe boasts illustrious credentials and is a full Professor of Mathematics and Science Education. He holds a Masters in Solid State Physics from Wits University and a PhD from the University of North West. He also holds another Masters in Technology Education from Harvard University, Cambridge Massachusetts, USA. Beyond the Harvard Fellowship, he is a recipient of a Senior Research Fulbright Fellowship. Prof Seepe has made immense contribution locally and internationally through research and scholarship of teaching.

Professor Seepe has written and spoken extensively on matters of public interest – ranging from politics, culture, affirmative action issues and education to matters relating to transformation of society.

He enjoys an elaborate international network of peers and academics, and this



Professor Siphon Seepe, UNIZULU Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Institutional Support.

has been beneficial to UNIZULU's efforts in strengthening partnerships and knowledge sharing. His experience is solid and blended, as he has worked both in the business and academic sectors.

The university is therefore certain that he will continue to contribute valuable knowledge in promoting research and development at various spheres of government.

## Strengthening partnerships with local schools to improve teaching and education quality

SAMKELE SOKHELA

THE University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) Faculty of Education recently held a fruitful dialogue with neighbouring schools under the uMhlatuze Municipality.

The meeting, which was held at the Bon Hotel in Richards Bay, was part of a series of strategic engagements that the university is conducting with various circuits in the King Cetshwayo District. The purpose of these engagements is to strengthen partnerships with schools by discussing ideas pertaining to the development of teachers and improving the quality of basic education, among other things.

During her address, Professor Sithabile Ntombela, Dean of the Faculty of Education, defined the event as a "critical meeting". She went on to encourage schools to produce positive results, regardless of the stand-still national crises.

"I am very passionate about education. I want to believe that you are as well. So, whenever an opportunity presents itself where we can talk about how best we can improve what we do, it is an opportunity that I always grab with both hands. As schools, circuits and district leadership, it is our primary responsibility to make sure that schools produce quality results, regardless of the grades taught," Prof Ntombela told school representatives.

In addition, she highlighted that the university and schools need one another to ensure that South Africa provides quality education.

"No country can be better than the quality of its teachers. And it is not a qualification that makes a teacher a good teacher, but it is commitment. So, if your heart is in what you are doing, (a huge) difference would be visible. And it starts with you as leaders. Whether our country gets out of the mess that it is in or whether



From left: Prof Bongani Gamede, Faculty of Education Deputy Dean: Research and Innovation; Dr Mpilo Dube, Head of Department of Social Sciences Education; Prof Samantha Govender, Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning; Senzo Dube, Circuits Manager; Prof Sithabile Ntombela, Faculty of Education Dean; and Velenkosini Goodwill Shandu, King Cetshwayo District Chief Education Specialist for Teacher Development Directorate.

our economy improves, all depends on us creating functional schools," she concluded.

Velenkosini Goodwill Shandu, Chief Education Specialist for the Teacher Development Directorate in the King Cetshwayo District, applauded the university for creating a platform for constructive dialogue. He further promoted self-accountability as one of the key traits everyone involved in the project should possess, if they hoped to reap positive results from the platform.

"It is important for everyone involved in this project to be honest and not defend our own terrains. I am a revolutionary. Being a revolutionary is about initiating changes that will ensure that people are developed. In our case, we seem to not be moving towards that direction. Our system is not doing that, and that is what we must talk about.

"We need to confront one another. A person becomes conscious when they are conscientised. (During the apartheid era) we were not aware that we were oppressed,

until some people told us that we were oppressed. We cannot fold our arms. Let us act now," Shandu implored the school representatives.

Circuits Manager, Senzo Dube said although there are various issues that require special attention in order to improve the quality of education, there is one outstanding issue that needs urgent focus.

"There are challenges in the manner we have structured our curriculum. If you look (at) the foundation phase, we use our mother tongue (when teaching in class) – and that is a problem. However, the most difficult challenge is localising our curriculum. For instance, we have a harbour in Richards Bay. The question now is: does our product in school speak to what we have in the area?" asked Dube.

He added: "I am not being xenophobic, but that is why when you go to industries in our region, 40% of the people that are working there are recruited outside of the country because they are addressing short skills."

## Erasmus+ project training championed with great success

PROFESSOR THANDI NZAMA

A team of select University of Zululand (UNIZULU) staff, together with other participants of the Erasmus+ SUCSESS Project, recently attended an educational training session that has equipped them with the skills of implementing innovative teaching methods using technology. This was aimed at enriching students' competencies and creating better career opportunities for them.

The Erasmus+ SUCSESS Project was launched in 2020 with a view to strengthening co-operation between higher education institutions and the industry in South Africa. It has its roots in an identified need to support the employability of graduates.

Professor Thandi Nzama, Deputy Dean in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) explained that the project also aims to support the professional development of lecturers. This is done in partnership with South African universities through sharing diverse teaching and learning methods and pedagogical approaches that are intended to enhance students' ability to gain the competencies that are required by the tourism industry.

In line with the aim of the project, four training sessions have been held. The fourth took place at Hagga Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland under the theme "Development of teaching for HEI industry co-operation". The training was attended by some 50 academics who represented six partner universities. These are the universities of Zululand, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Olu, Finland as well as Hagga Helia and Sheffield Hallam universities in Finland and England, respectively.

The UNIZULU delegation, which



Representatives of partner institutions of the Erasmus+ SUCSESS Project recently met at Hagga Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland during the fourth training session for the project.

comprised 14 staff members representing three of UNIZULU's faculties, was led by HSS Dean Professor, Mogomme Masoga.

The goal of the four-day training was three-fold, the first of which was for candidates from all participating universities to get the opportunity to meet face-to-face for the first time since the project commenced in 2020. The second objective was the exhibition of new technologies with the potential to increase opportunities for the employability of students. Finally, the candidates presented and shared experiences on strengthening links between the univer-

sity and the industry. There were eight sessions during which discussions were held on lecturers' professional development, technology in teaching, industry relations and technological competences, as well as ICT and teaching post Covid-19.

At the end of the session, participants agreed to execute a number of tasks, including preparing papers to be submitted for publication in accredited journals. The collective divided itself into smaller groups, each with an identified research focus area, to plan how this would be achieved.

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