

Minister of higher education's UNIZULU visit a resounding success

GCINA NHLEKO

DR Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, has applauded the University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) progressive efforts to salvage and successfully manoeuvre the 2020 academic year, while ensuring Covid-19 health and safety protocol is followed at its KwaDlangezwa and Richards Bay campuses.

Dr Nzimande was speaking during an oversight visit to the KwaDlangezwa Campus last week, to monitor the implementation of safety measures, particularly in the student residences.

The university is among a number of institutions which began receiving students and employees back to campuses under Level 3 of the lockdown.

"We are likely to finish the academic year around March next year, and I am very pleased that the university will be in line with this target, or even ahead for some students," said Dr Nzimande.

"This shows the university is committed to saving the academic year. This is a daunting task when you are trying



Dr Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, has expressed his satisfaction with the University of Zululand's plans to salvage the 2020 academic year.

Picture: James Thwala

to balance saving lives and sustainable livelihoods, because the academic year is the future livelihood for our graduates," he added.

The minister applauded the formation

of a Covid-19 task team, the delivery of study material to students, as well as efforts to monitor the remote participation of students undertaking academic activities.

UNIZULU is taking extra precautions and utmost diligence in ensuring compliant measures are in place in preparation for more students returning to campuses, amid peak infection rates across the country.

The institution, which has already been receiving final-year Nursing Science students, will, in the coming weeks, prioritise the return of 30 final-year Management Information Systems students; postgraduates in the Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law; and postgraduate students who are in the final phases of their laboratory experiments.

"The university wishes to reiterate that, while it is committed to the return of optimal numbers of students to campus, this process must be guided by prevailing national guidelines and realities," said University of Zululand Vice-Chancellor Professor Mtose.

The remaining students will continue to receive lectures through various platforms, including online and hard copies. Students' data has been rolled out as well to ensure that students have access and can submit their work material.

Public lecture addresses a depressing state of higher education system in South Africa

GCINA NHLEKO

WORLD-renowned and respected sociologist Professor Kweisi Kwaa Prah recently presented a thought-provoking virtual lecture on reconceptualising the African university at the University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) KwaDlangezwa Campus.

Prof Prah is a prolific author of several books and many articles on topics around Africa's history and writing on issues affecting the society and education system.

The sociologist's lecture formed part of UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor Professor Mtose's ongoing engagement sessions that are conceptualised as part of the University's 60th anniversary celebrations. The lecture is at the heart of what UNIZULU is trying to achieve, being an African university as opposed to being a university based in Africa. Prof Mtose alluded that in order to transform our universities, a shift in mindset is required. She elaborated that we need to dislocate ourselves from the colonial sphere and paradigm which expects universities located in the continent to be mere clones of those of previous colonial masters. Prof Prah's lecture sought to point out how this should unfold, by identifying the problem and features in order to truly experience and transform our institutions into African universities.

"The University of Zululand has deliberately redefined (itself) to be a university restructured for relevance. We understood it this way as ours should be a centre of strategic reflection and insight for it to be relevant," said Professor Mtose.

The lecture was an extension of the work done by UNIZULU academics in March at Salt Rock. The task of the group was to produce a series of thoughts and ideas with regards to the challenges that UNIZULU and other universities in South Africa and all over Africa face, with regards to their mandate, purpose, object to structure the content of their offerings as universities. This is a response to the fact that post colonialism in Africa and post-apartheid in South Africa in 1994 the process of dismantling the educational system and installing a new education system which is more answerable to the broader sections of the community has not been achieved. It is this realisation that we face a challenge to ourselves to be able to fashion an educational system which is substantively meaningful to the lives and upliftment of Africans.

Professor Prah mentioned that in South Africa there has been a habitual way of looking at a crisis from a historical perspective of advantaged-and-disadvantaged institutions lens. We have to realise that this is not a realistic way of looking at a crisis because all institutions are born from colonial experience.

UNIZULU has agreed to start as soon as possible to clearly identify the components that hinder the success of a university idea in Africa. African universities like the idea of a university that reproduces and replicates the institutional forms that have been inherited from colonial powers and these standards have been set and maintained from outside. We create the theatre of the observed by exposing students to foreign languages that are not used locally e.g. Latin and Greek in African Universities said Professor Prah.

"Even in this generation there are lots of people who think that spending a stint in an (overseas) institution like Oxford, Harvard etc. gives you a particular competitive edge over competitors than colleagues who are derived from our local institutions," said Professor Prah.

The priority solution is that African universities should be appetised by African concerns and interests, and seek to provide proper aligned African solutions. Our African history at the moment is an extension of western history and it is not surprising as it was written by colonial powers hence the distorted version of our society. According to Prof Prah, creating a centre for African languages, developing a unified Nguni dictionary and forming a consortium of universities in order to improve the curriculum offerings are some of the immediate solutions that are achievable.

The first respondent, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovations Professor Mashupye Kgaphola, stated that the Salt Rock discussions that Professor Prah alluded to resulted in the publication of the book titled "A UNIZULU Conversation: Reconceptualising the African University". This is an important milestone in the context of UNIZULU's 60th anniversary. The preeminent question, according to Prof Kgaphola, is how we will reclaim our intellectual sovereignty, 26 years into democracy, and look at what has and has not been achieved. Further, UNIZULU looked at how much effort it puts into what concerns it, lest it becomes an appendix in someone else's agenda- hence the importance of the language issue.

The second respondent, Dr Maxwell Shamase who is the Acting Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Arts, spoke of the denial of our identity which has resulted in the Western education promulgation. He emphasised that colonial ideas cannot continue to reign in our language, tradition and song. A university has to be culturally closer to the society in which it operates and be intellectually linked to the wider scholarly values of the world of learning. He concluded that universities must take an active part in the social revolution that is promoting African consciousness.

Six published articles and counting for PhD graduate

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

UNIVERSITY of Zululand (UNIZULU) PhD graduate Nkosinathi Dlamini is steadily carving his path as a prolific researcher, with an impressive record of six published articles and three revised manuscripts under review in accredited international journals within a space of two years.

Dr Dlamini completed his PhD under the supervision of the legendary Prof Viswanadha Pullabhotla and Prof Albertus Kotze Basson with a thesis entitled "A comparative study between Fe@Cu core-shell nanoparticles with iron and copper nanoparticles synthesized using a bioflocculant: characterization, industrial application and biosafety".

The objective of the study included, among other things, the synthesis of single and bi-metallic nanoparticles using an environmental friendly approach. Furthermore, it unpacked the application (the use) of these nanoparticles in various nanotechnology fields such as wastewater treatment, antimicrobial, cytotoxicity and dye removal.

Through this research, Dr Dlamini was able to establish that nanoparticles can be successfully synthesised using a pure bioflocculant and the findings



UNIZULU PhD graduate Nkosinathi Dlamini has been hard at work in the past two years and has managed to publish six articles in accredited journals, with the help of supervisors Prof Albertus Kotze Basson (left) and Prof Viswanadha Pullabhotla (right).

Picture: Sphamandla Gumede

showed that the nanoparticles have remarkable properties, which means they can be used in wastewater treatment to remove pollutants. They can also be used as antimicrobial agents as they indicated that are safe to use when cytotoxicity was investigated.

Reminiscing, Dr Dlamini acknowledged that his achievements in the past two years were a result of the contributions

of either family, friends or colleagues. He expressed his utmost gratitude to Prof Basson and Prof Pullabhotla for seeing to it that his PhD study was a success. In addition, he thanked the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) for its financial support.

On his experience with working with Dr Dlamini Prof Pullabhotla said: "Supervisors can offer assistance more effectively

when student-supervisor relationships exist and together we have developed a good working relationship which began when Dlamini was in master's, which lead to a successful master's project. Through his devotion and hardworking nature, he received his MSc in one year and was very close to attaining a distinction and this achievement for a student is colossal. This attainment in his career has brought inspiration for him to pursue his higher studies."

In his congratulatory message Prof Basson said he saw Dr Dlamini's potential when he was a BSc Honours student in Microbiology. His motivation and interest in research is what struck the academic, prompting him to take the student under his supervision. "I quickly realised that he wants to advance deeper into research and that is where I asked Prof Pullabhotla to get involved and guide Nathi in nanotechnology. Nathi finished his MSc in one year (missing a distinction by 2%) and immediately enrolled for PhD and finished this also in the record time of two years with numerous publications in accredited journals," Prof Basson said.

Born and bred in KwaShoba area in Pongola, Dr Dlamini is the first to obtain a PhD in his family. He said obtaining his PhD required setting career goals and working hard in order to reach them.

UNIZULU at forefront of boosting number of academic doctors in SA universities

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law (FCAL), in collaboration with the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the University of Glasgow (UoG), has been awarded a grant set to increase the percentage of academics with PhD qualifications in South African universities.

The grant has been awarded as part of the United Kingdom- South Africa University Staff Doctoral Programme, the second phase of the University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP) which was launched by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in July 2018.

The USDP initiative falls under DHET's broader University Capacity Development Programme which focuses on student development, staff development and programme or curriculum development.

Among the objectives of the USDP is promoting collaborations that seek to increase the number of academics with PhDs in South African institutions of



higher education (including enhancing the infrastructure and resources for PhD and master's supervision). Phase 2 of the USDP is intended to increase the number of permanent academic and professional staff at South African universities with doctoral degrees while also building supervisory capacity in postgraduate programmes.

To support this drive, the British Council partnered with DHET and issued a call in 2019 for a collaboration development grant.

Prof Lorraine Greyling, FCAL Dean and one of the UNIZULU supervisors of the USDP, explained: "In 2019, a HEI (higher education institutions) consortia collaboration grant application with

University of Johannesburg, University of Zululand as partner institution 1 and Glasgow University as partner institution 2 was submitted... The project (collaboration grant) is to support activities for the development of joint partnership programmes in support of doctoral training for academics at South African public higher education institutions. The grant was awarded in December 2019 and is active effectively from 2020."

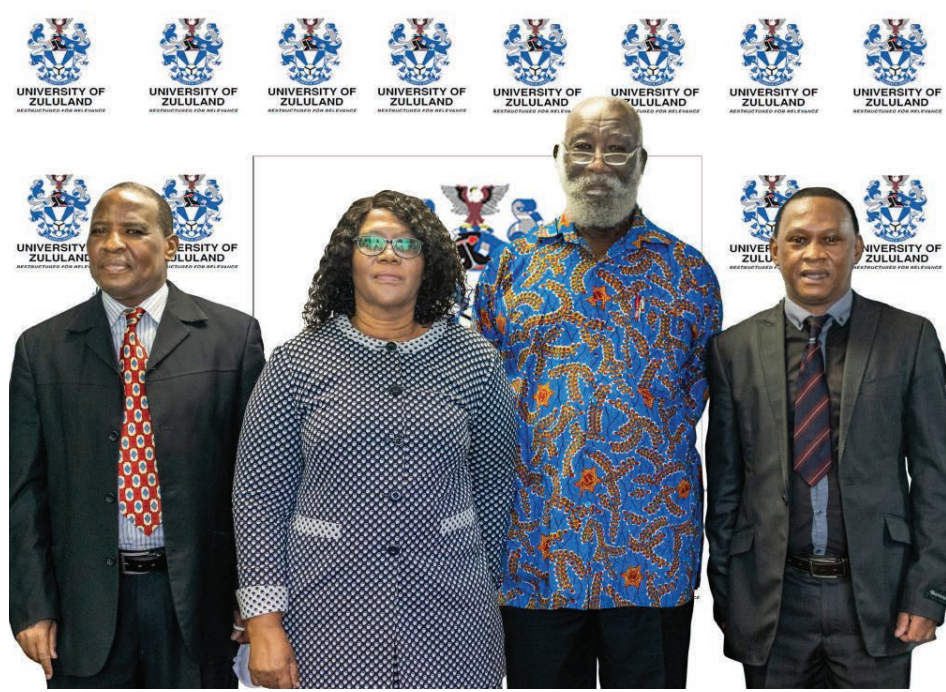
Following a rigorous selection process, ten candidates who are full-time academics in six South African universities were selected to participate in this programme. Of the ten candidates, three are from UNIZULU, three from Tshwane University of Technology, while the University of Venda, University of Mpumalanga and Durban University of Technology are each represented by single candidates.

The doctoral programme officially commenced in June with candidates coming together to consider the foundations of PhD study. The model of supervision that has been established offers an opportunity for staff from the three

institutions to jointly supervise a team of doctoral candidates. Based on collaborative principles the model moves away from "supervisor as expert" and moves towards a shared, collaborative approach to the studies.

Moreover, the programme is extending the collaborative approach to developing our future professors at South African institutions where both experienced and novice supervisors at partner institutions work in supervisory teams to guide the candidates. The UNIZULU supervisory team involves Prof Greyling and Dr Makhosazana Vezi-Magigaba and Dr Nokukhanya Jili, while Prof Irshad Kaseeram serves as a coordinator.

For the duration of their study, the doctoral candidates will attend a series of Learning Academies. These will allow the participants to hone and develop their research skills while meeting academics from across participating universities. The academies will also offer an important space for the candidates to engage in peer support during what can be a lonely journey of study.



From Left: Professor Mashupye Kgaphola, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation; Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor; Professor Kweisi Kwaa Prah, renowned sociologist and guest speaker during the recent public lecture at UNIZULU; and Dr Maxwell Shamase, Acting Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Arts.

Picture: James Thwala