

Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Innovation pays oversight visit to UNIZULU

SIVANDA MNTAMBO

THE Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, led by the chairperson Nompandolo Thobile Mkhathshwa, recently visited the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) at its Richards Bay Campus.

The purpose of this occasion was twofold: a walkabout to see the progress made on the construction of infrastructure projects, and a discussion around the readiness of the institution for registration as well as other institutional matters.

The event was attended by UNIZULU's Chairperson of Council Nomarashiya Caluza, members of the portfolio committee, DHET, and UNIZULU's executives, led by Vice-Chancellor Professor Xoliswa Mtose.

The help of government funding and internal financial resources at UNIZULU have enabled the institution to respond to a number of imperatives aimed at advancing and accelerating its vision of being a leading comprehensive university that thrives on quality and fosters innovative and collaborative cultures on both its rural and urban campuses.

The infrastructure projects include (but are not limited to) classrooms, laboratories, equipment, student residences, and the full range of underlying infrastructure to support digital systems.

Mkhathshwa touched on several issues and also addressed the reasons behind the visit. "This is not the first time we have visited the institution. We have engaged with the council and the executive on a



Sights of the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Innovation's oversight visit at UNIZULU. Picture: James Thwala.

number of issues and the day-to-day running of the institution, and we are glad to be back for this visit. I was very impressed by the work that you have done so far. We are here to see the progress of the infrastructure. We thought we cannot

see progress virtually, hence we planned this visit so that we can see how funds are spent and what is the development thereof."

In her presentation, Caluza expressed her gratitude for the engagements and

discussions that happen between the portfolio committee and the UNIZULU executives every time they meet.

"These visits make us, our board, and our leaders stronger. Every time you visit as part of your oversight responsi-

bilities as a committee, I get excited. I also value the decisions, commitments, reports, and presentations the university makes at operational and governance levels. It aims to improve communication between organisations, but it also

raises questions about clarity. This leads me to conclude that these are the best options or methods for resolving the particular problems you may encounter," said Caluza.

In her address, Prof Mtose introduced the UNIZULU team and shared the programme for the campus tour. "We will go to the engineering computer lab and lecture halls, and go to the site where we are busy with engineering building phase 1. This year, we are in our third year of engineering and it is important that we move forward with this project of building so that in their fourth year, students will be able to use the building once everything is done."

Further in her presentation, the Vice-Chancellor gave an outline of UNIZULU strategic map and state of readiness for the year ahead. She also touched on the highlights of 2022; important aspects of the state of governance and management; the registration and enrolment process, teaching and learning readiness; management and stakeholder relations; plans on the funding of new and returning students; and the status of the institution's finances.

The walkabout was followed by high-level engagements, deliberations, and recommendations, which will be presented to the Department of Higher Education and Training as well as to Parliament.

Professor Mtose and her team were commended for their visionary approach and progressive management of the institution.

UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor spots rare gem

GCINA NHLEKO

EMMANUEL Hare (24), a newly registered University of Zululand (UNIZULU) student from Ntuzuma in KwaZulu-Natal, has proven that it is never too late to turn your life around.

Hare obtained five distinctions in matric last year. His is a moving story of rising from the ashes and defying the dark voices. He beat the odds after turning to drugs and dropping out of school. He then decided to go back to school in 2020 to study Grade 10 – and has not turned

back. The decision to turn his life around is yielding big rewards and is marked by multiple achievements.

Hare has been accepted at UNIZULU to study BCom (Accounting) on a full bursary, which was presented by the University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Xoliswa Mtose. Upon coming across the plight of Hare, she had been deeply moved and touched – and thereafter, the university accepted Hare with open arms and has resolved to be there for him on his journey to shape his future for the better.

"We are familiar with stories like these because we are a rural university that deals

with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law will be assisting and giving him much-needed provision in various manners. We need to instil hope. Our job as educated people is to open opportunities and instil a sense of self that it is how you finish the race, despite life's impediments, that matters," said Prof Mtose.

"I didn't think this day would come. I thank people who are close to me; they made this possible. I went to register and get my student card, and my lecturers have already given me an Economics book to read," Hare said.

Tide turns for top matriculant who nearly took involuntary gap year

NALEDI HLEFANE

OWAMI Nqobile Dlamini (22), the top 2022 matriculant in uMfolozi Local Municipality, recently registered for the four-year Bachelor of Laws degree at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

The high achiever from eSikhawini had accepted that she would spend the year at home after her attempts to register for a law qualification at another institution had gone awry. Then she was advised by her mother's friend to seek academic space in UNIZULU's Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law – which she was granted.

"I only wanted to do law, so now I am happy that my dream of becoming a lawyer will be a reality," Dlamini said.

The aspirant lawyer has embraced the opportunity to study, particularly because she desperately wishes to improve her family's dire financial circumstances. Her mother and stepfather are unemployed and they rely on social grants.

Another reason for Dlamini's determination to succeed is the unpleasant experience she had while working in a retail store in 2019 – the year after she had first matriculated. She had only obtained 22 points, an outcome that did not perturb her initially since she had no intention of ever furthering her studies. She then changed her mind at a later stage due to the working conditions and menial pay of her job.

"Although I was not paying rent because I lived with my paternal grandmother, I got a real taste of what it is like to live on a minimum wage. I earned R3 500 monthly. The money was gone before I even knew it. I realised that this could possibly be my life forever – and it was not what I wanted for myself."

She resolved to go back to high school to repeat her matric. She was accepted at Mgezeni High School in Ntambanana, almost 50 km from eSikhawini. This



Owami Nqobile Dlamini, first-year LLB student, with Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor. Picture: Supplied.

meant she had to repeat her entire senior phase, because the school only accepts new learners entering Grade 8, 9 or 10.

Taking the plunge proved beneficial. She juggled eight subjects in matric and attained an astounding 44 points, with seven distinctions – for isiZulu, English, Mathematical Literacy, Business Studies, Tourism, Dramatic Arts and Life Orientation.

Dlamini credited this amazing performance to diligence and having a strong support base, while hailing her mother and maternal aunt as her biggest supporters. The top student also acknowledged her Mathematical Literacy and Business Studies teachers.

"Last year, I asked to live close to school so that I could attend all extra classes. I knew this would be tough on my mom financially, but she agreed. Mirac-

ulously, two of my teachers, Buthelezi and Mpungose, volunteered to pay for my rent and groceries for the year. I can't thank them enough," she said.

Dlamini's experiences in the past three years have taught her that turning one's life around is possible. All it takes is a willing heart, courage to begin the transformation process and determination to reach the goal. Her wish is that her story inspires anyone who may believe academic excellence is reserved for a select few. "It's not the smartest people who make it in life, but those who are willing to work hard," she reckoned.

Dlamini's mother, Zinhle Mbonane, said she was overjoyed by her daughter's achievement because it not only guaranteed her entry to university; she had also set a new academic standard for her younger siblings.



From left: Professor Lorraine Greyling, Dean of the Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law; Emmanuel Hare, first-year BCom (Accounting) student; Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor; and Deochund Mthilal, Registrar. Picture: Samkele Sokhela.

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UNIZULU to host South African Institute of Physics conference

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) is set to host the South African Institute of Physics (SAIP) conference in 2023. The conference will take place from July 3 to 7 at the Richards Bay Campus, with sessions of interest live-streamed to attract a wider audience and range of participants.

Unpacking the conference, Professor Thulani Jili, who heads the UNIZULU Physics and Engineering Department, said that this was the biggest physics conference in the country that attracted physicists from across the globe.

"Physicists from all corners of the country and globe (from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas) as well as postgraduate students will be given an opportunity to inform the physics community about their cutting-edge research findings. Conferences of this nature always present a perfect opportunity for scientists to network and establish new collaborations. Physics educators from the surrounding schools will also be invited to attend special sessions in the education division of the conference to improve physics education in their respective schools," Prof Jili said.

The conference will encompass all physics disciplines including condensed matter and materials; nuclear particle and radiation; photonics; astrophysics, space science; physics for development, education and outreach; applied physics; and theoretical computational physics.

According to Professor Nokuthula Kunene, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, in 2013 the Physics Department hosted the prestigious 58th Annual Conference of the South African Institute of Physics. It was lauded as one of the best physics conferences held in South Africa – and now, the SAIP Council has granted UNIZULU the rights to host the 67th SAIP.

"The conference shall also serve as a catalyst to establish new collaborations with national and international physics communities to advance physics research and its education. The conference will play a significant role in enhancing research skills of the postgraduate students. As DVC: Research and Innovation, it brings me pleasure to note that the conference proceedings will be peer-reviewed and published, and I urge the supervisors and their postgraduate students to seize this opportunity to increase the research output. I want to congratulate the



Members of the local organising committee of the 67th SAIP during their planning meeting in 2022. Picture: James Thwala.

local organising committee of the conference, led by Prof Jili, for putting UNIZULU on the world stage. Organising such a big conference is not easy, but I have trust in the capability of our Physics Department that they are going to, once again, stage a successful weeklong conference early in July 2023," said Prof Kunene.

One of the burning topics that will be discussed is the crisis in the energy sector. Eskom officials will be invited to a plenary session to inform and engage physicists, and discuss innovative ways that will assist the ailing energy sector to add several thousands of megawatts to the grid. The Dean of the Faculty of Science,

Agriculture and Engineering, Professor Khoboso Lehloenyana, also congratulated the Department of Physics for receiving the honour of hosting the prestigious SAIP. "Hosting this conference at UNIZULU comes at an appropriate moment when the institution is implementing a strategy titled 'A Node for African

Thought'. In one of the plenary sessions, the conference will discuss, among other topics, the current energy crisis in South Africa. Hosting the conference will also give physicists at UNIZULU an opportunity to showcase their work, interact with current collaborators and pursue new partnerships," Prof Lehloenyana said.

UNIZULU welcomes new Library Information Systems director

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) has welcomed Zanele Mathe in the role of Library Information Systems (LIS) Director.

She brings a wealth of knowledge of and 20 years experience in the higher education sector. Her journey commenced in 1999 when she worked at the Durban University of Technology as a careers resource librarian.

Elaborating on what inspired her to venture into libraries, Mathe said: "To be honest, I didn't know anything about libraries; we never had a library in my township then. My sister was the one passionate about libraries. She influenced me to study Library and Information Studies, so I can safely say she chose a career for me. My passion for libraries developed as I got exposed to the discipline."

Her role involves overseeing the management of the library operations, and ensuring there is alignment of the library services with the strategic objectives of the university. It also entails reskilling staff and empowering them to experiment, release, and constantly enhance the library's digital offerings to provide a better library user experience. All this will be done in collaboration with different stakeholders, internally and externally.

The newly appointed director doesn't subscribe to one specific management style; instead, she prefers to adopt differ-



Zanele Mathe, UNIZULU's newly appointed Library Information Systems director. Picture: Mbuyiselo Mlaba.

ent styles for different situations. However, her style of leadership mostly cuts across the consultative, transformational and persuasive management styles.

Mathe said she looks forward to working closely with all the stakeholders of the university to improve on a great job already in place. "I am excited about the journey ahead, and looking forward to good working relationships that are geared towards building a smart university that is rooted to the ideals of Africa," she said.

To unwind, Mathe loves taking a drive to explore places she has never visited before. Her mantra is: "Greater is He that is in me".

Armed Forces Day 2023 hosted in Richards Bay

GCINA NHLEKO

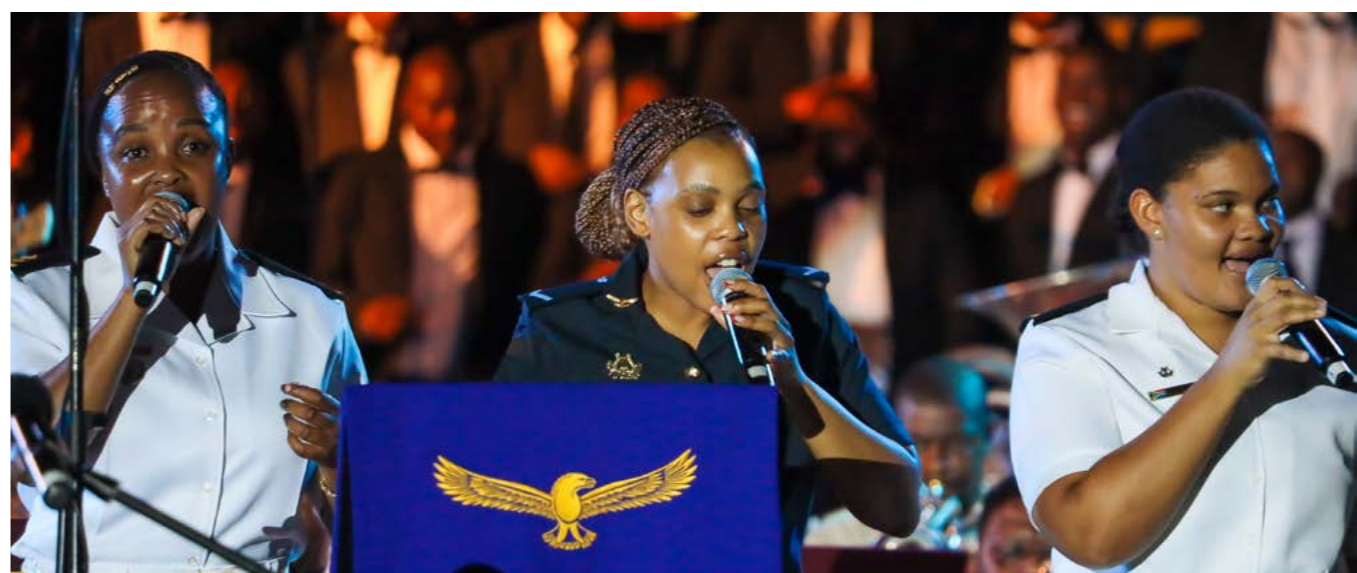
THE South African National Defence Force (SANDF) held the 2023 Armed Forces Day (AFD) celebrations in Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal. AFD is one of the most significant events on the SANDF's yearly calendar and is hosted in different provinces on a rotational basis.

Ahead of the main parade, which was held on February 21, a series of build-up activities took place at the University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) KwaDlangezwa and Richards Bay campuses. Through this SANDF-UNIZULU partnership, the South African Military Health Services (SAMHS) also collaborated with the university in hosting recruitment drives on both campuses over a period of three days.

SAMHS members also conducted a mini capability demonstration at the KwaDlangezwa Sports Field where they showcased some of their day-to-day functions.

A highlight of the build-up activities was a gala concert held at UNIZULU's King Bhekuzulu Hall. This two-hour special saw UNIZULU staff and students as well as members of the public treated to pleasurable and memorable performances by the military bands.

With this annual event, the SANDF aims to, among other things, honour serving members who serve the nation with pride, and pay special tribute to soldiers who paid the ultimate price and lost their lives in the line of duty. Another aspect is taking the SANDF to the people, thereby enabling communities who ordinarily are not exposed to the SANDF to have first-hand experience of the organisation while interacting with the men and women in uniform and their prime military equipment.



Pictures: James Thwala.



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