

SADiLaR language resources audit comes to UNIZULU

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) participated in the national language resources audit this month, which is currently being conducted by the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR) across all 26 public institutions of higher learning.

"The language resources audit is a Universities South Africa (USAf) mandated project that was supported by the USAf board. Although it is called an 'audit', SADiLaR is merely collecting information at this stage on language resources available at institutions to be able to make recommendations to USAf. This is in terms of what is at sector-wide disposal, what are the needs, and what the realities are for successfully implementing the language policy framework for public higher education institutions," said Thembeile Ndimande, Director: Quality Assurance at UNIZULU.

The language policy framework was revised by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2020, owing to the glaring language barrier issue that hinders students' success in public institutions. The policy now highlights the importance of developing and strengthening indigenous languages as languages of scholarship, teaching and learning, and communication in all governmental tertiary institutions.

The one-day UNIZULU audit was co-ordinated by the university's institutional planning and quality assurance division. It entailed SADiLaR engaging with the university's executive management, academic staff members and students selected from all four faculties at the university. The engagement focused on, among others, the strides already taken by UNIZULU towards responding to the national language policy frame-



The second session of the language resources audit included a select group of students, who had a robust discussion with the university's executive management and the SADiLaR team. Photo: Samkele Sokhela

work, as well as required personnel and equipment to transform the university environment into a multilingual space.

Two sessions were held – one with executive management and staff, followed by another with students. Based on the KwaZulu-Natal demographics, UNIZULU has identified English and isiZulu as its two official languages.

Professor Nokuthula Kunene, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation, noted that the university has made headway in compliance with DHET's policy.

"We are currently working on translating the abstracts of the research theses and dissertations from the last graduation to isiZulu," she said.

She clarified that there were many other plans in the pipeline. These include developing a glossary of isiZulu terms to be used across the four faculties, translating the guideline for writing proposals to

isiZulu by end of 2024, infusing isiZulu into the branding manual, installing signage written in isiZulu in the two campuses, having a bilingual website, and ensuring that all modules have definitions of key concepts in isiZulu.

It emerged during the session with staff that some content of a handful of modules, offered in the agriculture department, has been translated and uploaded onto the online learning platform Moodle. Furthermore, as a start, the expertise of staff in the departments of African Languages and Culture, General Linguistics, Modern Languages, as well as language-based departments in the Faculty of Education could be utilised for the purpose of drafting the isiZulu glossary terms.

An isiZulu dictionary that is being developed through external funding with some UNIZULU academics from the Department of African Languages and

Culture is close to completion, and was viewed as a great resource.

While the necessity of a bilingual UNIZULU was acknowledged by both focus groups, there were still concerns about the lack of resources to apply the policy. The lack of a language centre and its resources was the main one, followed by the need for auto translation devices in lecture rooms, as well as professional translators to translate content from English to isiZulu.

"The bottom line is that we need funding, and for us to hire professional translators will require funding. For example, if you want to make use of bilingual signage, that needs lots of money, communication and marketing," said Prof Vuyokazi Nomlomo, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning.

"You will find that most Africans are multilingual. They will speak more than two languages. It challenges us as an institution to try and devise some means of developing multilingual pedagogies. You might be multilingual, but it does not mean that you'll be able to teach students in a multilingual mode. So, there is definitely a dire need for funding to train our academics and support staff in terms of using digital pedagogies or digital communication means."

Reflecting on the Language audit, Ndimande said, "Listening to the discussions from both staff and students sessions, there is a need for the university to socialise its language policy and devise means to monitor its implementation plan.

"The language policy at UNIZULU should also be viewed as another vehicle to embrace the university as a node for African thought. More language indabas need to take place at the university for everyone to understand the purpose of the UNIZULU language policy."

UNIZULU engineering programmes granted provisional ECSA accreditation



The University of Zululand was recently granted provisional accreditation for two of its engineering academic programmes by the Engineering Council of South Africa. Photo: James Thwala

SABELO ZIKALALA

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently hosted the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) for the provisional accreditation of the Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical Engineering and the Bachelor of Engineering in Mechanical Engineering academic programmes, offered at the Richards Bay Campus.

The ECSA team engaged several university stakeholders including the executive committee; Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (FSAE) management; heads of FSAE departments including departments servicing the two programmes; as well as support staff such as the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance Division, and Teaching and

Learning Centre, among others.

During the two-day engagement, ECSA conducted site visits, reviewed programme-specific documentation, and assessed the programmes' curricula, faculty qualifications, facilities, and other essential aspects of the programmes. Following this rigorous process, ECSA granted UNIZULU provisional accreditation.

The ECSA provisional accreditation is a recognition given to engineering programmes offered by universities or educational institutions in South Africa. This accreditation status indicates that the programme has met the initial set of requirements and standards set forth by ECSA for the specific field of engineering.

UNIZULU hosts first International Conference on Community Engagement and Service

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently hosted the inaugural International Conference on Community Engagement and Service in partnership with the University of Venda (UNIVEN), Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), Botho University, Botswana and Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.

The hybrid event, which took place at Umfolozi Hotel Casino Convention Resort in Empangeni, was aimed at promoting contextual, scholarly engagements for social impact among communities in southern Africa. The chosen theme was, "We are because you are: community engagement and the scholarship of engaged interface".

In her address, Professor Nokuthula Kunene, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation, welcomed all the participants to the conference. She said that community engagement conferences should enhance the dissemination of knowledge emanating from participatory research. "One of the characteristics of community-based research is that it also includes common knowledge of the community where the research is being done. In Africa, the Covid-19 pandemic taught us the importance of harnessing indigenous knowledge for managing the coronavirus. Various reports showed that use of society's indigenous knowledge and identified areas of improvement means the danger posed by Covid-19 can be curtailed through indigenous curative measures and initiatives.



UNIZULU recently hosted the first International Conference on Community Engagement and Service aimed at promoting contextual, scholarly engagements for social impact.

decolonisation of the curriculum. The University of Zululand 2022 to 2027 strategy which is anchored on the theme 'A Node for African Thought' has it in one of the goals to ensure that the institution is Africanised by engaged research," said Prof Kunene.

Several keynote speakers from international organisations addressed attendees on diverse matters.

Dr Stanley Maphosa, Chief Programmes Officer at Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, was a keynote speaker during the gala dinner. Dr Maphosa touched on the issue of poverty and unemployment. "We are living in a country where many people find themselves being struck by poverty and unemployment. Nelson Mandela formed this organisation with the realisation that the government alone couldn't bridge this gap. He was contributing a third portion of his salary to this centre. Let us continue to assist these communities through organisations such as the Nelson Mandela

Children's Fund," said Dr Maphosa.

According to Dr Mammusa Lekoa, the Community Engagement Manager, the conference was a resounding success. She thanked all the authors who contributed to the conference and were willing to share their experiences within the prominent domains of community engagement – namely engaged research, engaged teaching and learning, civic engagement, community-industry university partnerships, social innovation, service learning, and social entrepreneurship.

"This was our inaugural conference as the University of Zululand, which focused on matters of engagement. It was a collaborative effort between UNIZULU as a physical host, UNIVEN, MUT, Botho University and Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. The conference was an academic activity that allowed the scholars to engage with each other, share ideas, showcase their work and network," explained Dr Lekoa.

Another SAIP conference successfully hosted by UNIZULU

NALEDI HLEFANE

PHYSICISTS and physics postgraduate students from various parts of the world recently descended on the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) Richards Bay Campus for the 67th annual South African Institute of Physics (SAIP) conference.

UNIZULU's Professor Thulani Jili termed this as the biggest physics conference in the country, as SAIP brings together physicists from around the globe to share their cutting-edge research findings. Moreover, it further promotes networking, which potentially leads to collaborations.

The conference encompassed all disciplines in physics 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.

The five-day programme commenced with a one-day winter school edition, during which postgraduate students from various South African universities learnt about two identified topical areas of physics. This year's conference focused on quantum technology and nanotechnology – two fast-growing fields which, in Prof Jili's opinion, are relevant for the technological demands of this era. The winter school was followed by four days of enriching plenary and parallel sessions, closing off with a glitzy gala dinner at UNIZULU's King Bhekuzulu Hall on the KwaDlangezwa Campus.

In welcoming the attendees, Professor Khoboso Lehloanya, Dean of the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (FSAE) said it was an honour and a privilege to host the 67th Annual Conference of the South African Institute of Physics. "We are all aware that an occasion of



The 67th SAIP conference, recently hosted by the University of Zululand, united seasoned and emerging physicists for five days at UNIZULU's Richards Bay Campus. Picture: James Thwala

such magnitude is bound to create many opportunities to engage with national and international experts in the fields of physics, engineering and technology. The university, having positioned itself as a 'node for African thought', subscribes to robust debate, discussion, critical thinking, research for the African agenda, as well as academic excellence."

During the gala dinner, Professor Innocent Moyo, FSAE Deputy Dean: Research and Innovation, commended the physics department as well as other members of the local organising committee for successfully hosting the conference. He said the team's efforts were on par with those of the committee that planned the 58th conference, hosted by the university nearly a decade ago.

"The conference has come and gone, and we are waiting for the big flame from the tiny spark. This is because I have been reliably informed that all the discussions and deliberations were a big success. We believe that out of the con-

ference great ideas and innovations and other developments and outputs, which will respond to the needs of society and thus contribute to the betterment of the human condition, will emerge.

"I am also reliably informed that there will be a flurry of high-impact publications which will come out of this conference. Taken together, these are indices that we can ably use to measure the roaring success of this great conference," Prof Moyo enthused.

Equally impressed by the success of the conference was Prof Jeffery Lynn, who had travelled from the United States of America. He unequivocally stated that the conference was "terrific" and added that meeting many young up-and-coming physicists – both male and female – was the highlight for him.

The gala dinner was marked by an awards ceremony that saw multiple post-graduate students recognised for their groundbreaking research and presenting skills, among other categories.

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PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law (FCAL) at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) in partnership with iLembe District Municipality, recently hosted an appreciation luncheon to honour Economics Department lecturers Mashapa Sekome and Yolanda Nkomo for their contribution to the improvement of the economics pass rate in the district.

As part of the Economics Department's commitment to expanding the knowledge of iLembe District high school teachers, Mashapa and Nkomo are currently training economic management sciences teachers in Ndwedwe, Maphumulo and KwaDukuza.

"In a transforming society, the way we think about teaching economics needs to change. This initiative is in line with the faculty's vision to be a faculty of choice and relevance for commerce, administration, law, and the local community in ensuring a supportive and caring ethos that contributes meaningfully to the quality of life of all who live in the region of KZN, South Africa and the African continent within the global context," Sekome said.

Recognising that high schools in the identified areas within the district were underperforming in economics, Subject Advisor Sindi Mzimela approached the UNIZULU Department of Economics to formally offer an intervention to improve the performance of economics learners. Sekome, who had already been requested by Professor Irrshad Kaseeram, FCAL Deputy Dean: Research and Internationalisation to co-ordinate community engagement projects in the Economics Department, automatically formed part of this project. Together with colleagues from the department, he conducted workshops for teachers and offered lessons to learners – a fruitful exercise. In the workshops, topics such as market structures, market failures, inflation, and economic and social indicators were covered.

"The seminars are going well, and they are already bearing fruit. The pass rate has improved," Sekome noted.

Mzimela expressed gratitude for the work done by the economics lecturers. Likewise, Deputy Chief Education Specialist Nkosinomusa Ngcobo appreciated the effort put in by the lecturers. "As iLembe, we are so humbled and grateful. If this initiative can be escalated to other subjects, we would be so happy because we can see the impact. As a district, we are now number three – and Sekome has

UNIZULU Economics lecturers are changing the face of economics teaching



Mashapa Sekome receives a token of appreciation in recognition of his integral role in improving the economics pass rate in various iLembe District Municipality high schools. Photo: Samkele Sokhela

contributed immensely to where we are," Ngcobo said.

Prof Kaseeram said that FCAL is proud of Sekome, who has been working tirelessly and making huge sacrifices for the project's success. "The success he has achieved is astounding, with the iLembe District ranking in the matric results involving Economics improving by five positions. This is a remarkable achieve-

ment for rural areas. Sekome made a breakthrough when he identified the problem was not the content, but the way teachers were delivering to students. He showed them methods that we use on campus in simplifying complicated and technical concepts into approaches that are easy to understand; hence the remarkable success that was achieved. "Sekome is busy preparing research

papers for teaching and learning, and community engagement conferences on his experiences. This shows that he is not only a committed educator but also a consummate academic, for many of us will now benefit from his documented insights. We are the richer to have him in our faculty," concluded Prof Kaseeram.

Sekome now has a YouTube channel called Sekonomics.

New national soccer team strips designed by UNIZULU alumnus

NALEDI HLEFANE

DHIRUBHAI Ambani, an Indian businessman, once said that "for those who dare to dream, there is a whole world to win".

University of Zululand (UNIZULU) alumnus Lwazi Ngcungama from Gcilitima near Port Shepstone, KwaZulu-Natal is a quintessential example of this. He may not have conquered the whole world yet, but he has made a notable mark in the clothing design space.

Ngcungama came up top in Le Coq Sportif's 2022 search for fresh jersey designs for the national soccer teams – Banyana Banyana and Bafana Bafana. The competition entries were opened in July 2022. The top five and then the top three designs were picked by public vote, before Ngcungama's concepts were announced as South Africa's choice in November. What followed were months of adjusting and fine-tuning the designs with the Le Coq Sportif team. The first official design was then revealed for the world to see during Banyana Banyana's first game with Sweden in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

"It still feels unreal. Even now, I just haven't processed the whole thing. I

think maybe when I see someone wearing the jersey on the street it will start to sink in," the designer said. He also noted how impressed he was by the manufacturer's workmanship when he first saw the tangible product. He only had one word to describe the jersey – "beautiful".

Entering the competition came with its challenges for Ngcungama, who did not have a laptop at the time. Fortunately, he was assisted by a friend who lent him his laptop whenever he could. He submitted three concepts, two for the official jerseys and one for the warm-up jersey.

"The yellow jersey represents the nation, as it incorporates the normal yellow and gold usually worn by Bafana Bafana and Banyana Banyana. The green jersey – which is the away one – was inspired by the Banyana Banyana WAFCON win in 2022 because on the day they won, they wore a green jersey," he explained.

Ngcungama holds an Environmental Planning and Development Studies degree as well as Honours in Anthropology from UNIZULU. While seeking employment in his field of study, Ngcungama works as a freelance graphic designer.



UNIZULU alumnus, Lwazi Ngcungama, played an instrumental role in the design of the new national soccer team jerseys. Photo: Supplied



The new Banyana Banyana and Bafana Bafana team jerseys. Photo: Supplied

PAMELA MLABA

THIS year marked the first time that the Department of Creative Arts at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) won the Standard Bank Ovation Award at the National Arts Festival, which took place recently in Makhanda (former Grahamstown) in the Eastern Cape.

The National Arts Festival has long been a highlight on South Africa's cultural calendar as an event at which artists and visitors gather, engage and celebrate the arts.

UNIZULU students performed with virtuosity in two plays – Faces and Ntyilo-Ntyilo-Umhlangikazi.

Faces, which won the hearts of many, was eventually named one of the top productions of the festival; earning a Standard Bank Ovation Award.

According to Masedi Manenye, a lecturer in the Creative Arts Department, this prestigious award goes to a theatrical/stage play that is well produced, presented, well-received by the audience and with a script and cast that stands out, among other things.

Faces is a one-woman play about having the courage to fall and stand. It was written by former UNIZULU lecturer Gift Marovatsanga, directed by Manenye and performed by UNIZULU student Ntandoyenkosi Bhengu. The theatrical piece speaks on the emotional, physical and psychological challenges women face in a society that lives in a system that promotes inhumanity. The drama also touches on the human responsibility to make the world a better place.

Speaking after receiving the news of their accomplishment, Manenye said: "I am excited that the play was acknowledged at the festival – also happy for the

UNIZULU Creative Arts Department wins top award at National Arts Festival



Ntandoyenkosi Bhengu displaying her noteworthy acting prowess during a staging of Faces at UNIZULU's KwaDlangezwa Campus. Photo: James Thwala.

writer, Gift Tapiwa Marovatsanga and the performer, Ntandoyenkosi Bhengu.

"I'm cheerful for our university, faculty and department for gaining this recognition. I am satisfied with the work we put in this success story."

Marovatsanga recalled the audience reaction to Bhengu's talent, saying: "Ntandoyenkosi Bhengu gave an amazing

performance at the show's opening. The actress is phenomenal; she has matured as a performer.

"The character Faces is complex and demanding, but Ntando has found a way to embody that character sincerely and tell her story with such honesty and without holding back. This, also aided by the excellent interpretation and direction

given to the text by phenomenal Masedi Godfrey Manenye, is exactly why the play received the Standard Bank Ovation Award on the second day of its staging."

Marovatsanga said that Bhengu took the audience along on the emotional rollercoaster that Faces experiences, leaving most of them with nothing but gratitude and appreciation – not only for the story, but also for the sincerity in which it was told.

"I'm proud of the work and efforts we have put as the cast and crew to craft the production. I'm looking forward to all future endeavours that come with Faces," Bhengu said.

She also paid homage to the sound and light engineers as well as to Manenye. "I owe it all to Masedi, because he made the character. He would check on my well-being as the play was very draining and emotional," she added.

According to Marovatsanga, the crew has already started receiving invitations to take the show to other places and venues. Invites from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Johannesburg and the One-man/woman Theatre Festival are on the cards.

"The audience appreciated the work and further expressed that Faces should not only be performed in Grahamstown, but across the country as well. They gave it blessings," Manenye concluded.

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