

UNIZULU continues to empower LO teachers through annual seminar



UNIZULU's 3rd annual Teachers Seminar brought together Life Orientation teachers from the King Cetshwayo District. | Xolani Ncube

NOMVELO XULU

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently held its highly anticipated 3rd annual Teachers Seminar at the UNIZULU Science Centre.

Organised by the university's Communications and Marketing Division (CMD), the event brought together Life Orientation (LO) teachers from the King Cetshwayo District (KCD) to create a platform for collaboration, knowledge-sharing and inspiration.

This seminar was born out of the recognition that there had been a lack of career guidance in schools, and aimed to address this gap by equipping LO teachers with updated requirements for entry at UNIZULU and other institutions. It also sought to motivate LO teachers by affirming their importance in the education system. The event not only provided valuable insights and resources, but also fostered a sense of pride and purpose

among the attendees.

The seminar was officially opened by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Teaching and Learning, Professor Vuyokazi Nomlomo, who emphasised the critical role of LO teachers in shaping the future of learners.

"This seminar underscores the critical role of LO in shaping both basic and higher education landscapes. LO is more than just a subject; it is a transformative force that equips students with essential life skills, ethical grounding and an awareness of their social responsibilities. At the school level, LO fosters personal development, career readiness and social consciousness. It ensures that learners are prepared not just for academic success, but for the realities of the world beyond the classroom," said Prof Nomlomo.

One of the standout presentations was delivered by Tony Moodley, chief education specialist from the KCD Department

of Basic Education. He shared compelling statistics that showcased the remarkable progress made by schools in KCD. The 2024 bachelor pass rate of 51.96% represents an impressive 8.3% increase from the 2023 results, and marks the highest percentage ever achieved by the district. This achievement has opened doors for 9 567 candidates to pursue tertiary education – a testament to the hard work and dedication of both teachers and learners. Moodley also highlighted the significant increase in the number of schools achieving a 100% pass rate, which rose from 22 in 2023 to 34 in 2024.

"Life orientation plays an important and substantive role in the lives of our learners and in preparing them for future careers, as well as to become useful citizens in our country," said Moodley.

The seminar also featured a presentation by the Central Applications Office (CAO), which provided LO teachers with essential information on university appli-

cation processes.

Dr Sithuthukile Myeni from the UNIZULU Department of Social Work delivered an inspiring presentation titled "The Power of Collaboration in Supporting Learners". She emphasised the importance of teamwork among educators in creating a supportive environment for learners.

Dr Thanduxolo Mngomezulu from the Department of Education shared a career guidance presentation. In his presentation, he highlighted challenges and solutions for overcoming obstacles. "Career guidance is a lifelong process that requires self-reflection, exploration and development. Take control of your career journey and start achieving your goals," he said.

The seminar concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks delivered by Siyanda Mntambo, director of CMD. He expressed gratitude to all participants and presenters.

Sibusiso Mthembu represents UNIZULU in prestigious Budget Speech competition

NALEDI HLEFANE

FOLLOWING his participation in the 2024 Nedbank and Old Mutual Budget Speech Competition, UNIZULU student Sibusiso Mthembu has gained immense exposure to the inner workings of the economics industry – which has reinforced his passion to work as an economist in one of the state entities.

Mthembu is a Master's student in UNIZULU's Department of Economics. He was among 10 finalists of the annual competition in the postgraduate category.

"I'm humbled by the opportunity to have been selected to be among the top 10 in South Africa. This says a lot about UNIZULU and the quality of its students and graduates," said Mthembu while reflecting on his overall experience.

Initiated in 1972, the Nedbank and Old Mutual Budget Speech Competition challenges entrants (undergraduate and postgraduate students registered for an economics course at any recognised South African institution of higher education) to think critically about economic matters by tasking them to conduct research on a topical economic issue.

In 2024, postgraduate entrants were tasked with drafting a compelling essay on the "prospects for medium-term

economic growth in South Africa against the background of the possibility of coalition government on a national government level".

Out of more than 400 entries, Mthembu's essay impressed the judging panel and earned him a spot in the coveted top 10 who attended the national budget speech delivered in Cape Town. Ahead of attending the main event, the finalists participated in a week-long programme. This included a one-on-one interview with the adjudication panel, where each entrant was asked a series of questions related to the essay topic. In this round, the panel evaluated each student based on their "intellectual sparkle, ability to formulate and express rational arguments, and understanding and knowledge of topical economic issues".

While he did not qualify for the top three positions, Mthembu is "humbled to have shared a room with many prominent people such as Dr Mampho Modise, the deputy governor of the South African Reserve Bank; Isaah Mhlana, a renowned economist; and Enoch Godongwana, Minister of Finance".

Mthembu is among a handful of UNIZULU postgraduate students who have made the top 10 of the budget speech competition. The university secured its sole victory in 2018 in the undergraduate category.



Sibusiso Mthembu, finalist in the 2024 Nedbank and Old Mutual Budget Speech Competition. | Xolani Ncube

Empowering communities through knowledge sharing and collaboration

PAMELA MLABA

THE Community Engagement (CE) office at UNIZULU recently hosted the first Research Dissemination Forum, which aimed to engage with communities from the Umfolozi Local Municipality and City of uMhlathuze Municipality.

Held at Umfolozi Casino, the event formed part of a knowledge-sharing and innovation empowerment drive to build partnerships with communities in which university researchers and students had conducted research.

Among the attendees were representatives of the Mkhwanazi Tribal Authority, Lungelo Youth Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal, uMfolozi and City of uMhlathuze municipalities, as well as Ngwelezane Hospital.

The event kicked off with welcoming remarks by Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Innovation, Professor Noku-thula Kunene. She emphasised that the establishment of this knowledge forum is the foundation for a long and healthy relationship between the university and its surrounding communities.

She further explained that sharing research findings with the community is essential for several reasons. It promotes transparency, accountability and trust between researchers and the community. It also fosters collaboration, innovation and social impact. Moreover, it helps communities make informed decisions about their lives and environment.

"Let's work together to make sure



UNIZULU's Community Engagement office hosted its first Research Dissemination Forum to engage with communities from Umfolozi Local Municipality and City of uMhlathuze Municipality. | Samkele Sokhela

that our research benefits society and improves lives in our communities," said Prof Kunene.

Director of Research Innovation, Professor Bryon Brown elaborated on the university's commitment to engaging and transforming communities for the benefit of all. He mentioned that the event was not a one-time occurrence, and that it would become a regular activity for the university. Furthermore, he stated that UNIZULU is more committed than ever to transferring the knowledge and technology generated from its research. The goal of the research dissemination forum is to see ideas translated into new products and services.

"Mutual benefit is the anchor of empowerment," Prof Brown highlighted. "Let's join hands to develop these ideas into workable solutions."

The projects presented by students were drawn from the local communities across the two municipalities. During the event, attendees were entertained by Maskandi music linked to one of the studies presented; emphasising the reality of African people. The performances were by Malibongwe Gwala (Mjolisi) and Lindokuhle Gcwensa (Navigator).

Sandile Mkhwanazi from the Mkhwanazi Tribal Authority extended his gratitude to the organising committee for the invitation. He urged the university

to build stronger relationships with the community and work collaboratively to develop solutions.

Northandazo Mbandazayo, the CE manager, extended a heartfelt vote of thanks to all attendees for their participation and support. She expressed appreciation for the contributions made by everyone involved, and encouraged the importance of continued collaboration between the university and the surrounding communities. She also encouraged all those present to stay engaged in the ongoing efforts to create positive social change and to work together towards innovative solutions.



| Samkele Sokhela

University of Zululand (UNIZULU) professor and lecturer Professor Khajamohiddin Syed is one of three researchers who have developed a pivotal tool for the automated identification and classification of P450 families and subfamilies. Cytochrome Monooxygenases (CYPs/P450s) is a group of proteins that belong to a superfamily of oxidoreductases that play a vital role in human drug metabolism and detoxification. The tool was developed in conjunction with Prof Dominik Gront from the University of Warsaw in Poland and

Prof David R Nelson from the University of Tennessee in the United States. It is hosted on a database that allows researchers to submit protein sequences and instantly receive information on which sequences are P450s and their corresponding family and subfamily designations. This development marks a significant advancement in P450 research. The database currently features over a million sequences, with more being added daily. The innovative tool is now part of a website named "P450ATLAS".

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