

Official opening of three landmark UNIZULU buildings geared towards building futures

SBAHLE DUMAKUDE

"AS we cut the ribbon today, let it not only symbolise the opening of these buildings, but also strengthen our collective resolve to use the instrument of education to transform the lives of the people of our province, country and continent."

These profound words were expressed by Science, Technology and Innovation Minister, Professor Bonginkosi Emmanuel Blade Nzimande during the official opening ceremony of a newly constructed building and two refurbished residences at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

Appropriately, the official ceremony was held in the new Engineering Department building which is named after Prof Nzimande and is located within the Richards Bay Campus. The two residences are also named in honour of distinguished South African luminaries whose enduring legacies continue to inspire and shape the nation. The Mr Cyril Vuyani Gamede Building, situated less than 10km away from the Richards Bay Campus, carries the name of UNIZULU's former chairperson of council who was instrumental in the university's journey towards offering



The opening ceremony was held in the new Engineering Department building, which is named after Prof Blade Nzimande and is located within the Richards Bay Campus. | Samkele Sokhela

engineering academic programmes. Meanwhile, the Madiba Complex at the KwaDlangezwa Campus honours late president and struggle hero, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

This landmark occasion underscored the university's unwavering dedication to advancing academic excellence and

enhancing student well-being.

Among those in attendance at this prestigious event were esteemed dignitaries and stakeholders, including Chairperson of the UNIZULU Council, Professor David Mabunda; Deputy Chairperson of the UNIZULU Council, Dr Andrew Kaniki; UNIZULU

Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Xoliswa Mtsoe; deputy vice-chancellors; members of the University Council and Senate; uMhlatuze Municipality Mayor, Councillor Xolani Ngwezi; student leaders; academic and administrative staff; media representatives; and other key partners.

For Prof Mabunda, the event represented more than the mere naming of buildings; it was about creating enduring spaces for learning that will serve generations to come. He termed the unveiling of the Blade Nzimande Engineering Building as a historic milestone in the university's journey.

"The establishment of the Department of Engineering stands as a testament to the university's commitment to academic excellence and societal progress. Notably, UNIZULU is the first historically disadvantaged institution (HDI) in post-apartheid South Africa to offer an engineering programme," he said.

A shared message among all speakers was a call to students to protect the buildings, as they are not only for today's learners, but for future generations.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony began at the Engineering Building, led by Prof Nzimande, Prof Mtsoe, Councillor Ngwezi and Prof Mabunda, followed

by a tour of the aesthetically pleasing facility. Attendees then moved to the Mr Vuyani Cyril Gamede Building, where the Gamede family led the ribbon-cutting segment that was followed by a tour.

Prof Mtsoe also shared a few words in remembrance of the late Council member. "I would like to take this moment to honour and dedicate this building to my hero and my leader, uBab' Gamede. Without him, I can say with pride, I wouldn't be where I am today. He was a pillar of strength at times when storms were really rough at the University of Zululand."

She added that Gamede offered guidance with clarity and conviction. Although he had a great sense of humour, he was also someone you could lean on in times of trouble. Prof Mtsoe noted that she worked closely with Gamede, and he had unwavering confidence in the success of the university. "The seed of the engineering idea was planted by him - it was his passion, rooted in his identity as an engineer."

The final stop was the Madiba Complex, where Prof Nzimande once again cut the ribbon. A former resident, the minister revisited his old room - representing a full circle moment for him.

The politics of violence: Understanding GBVF through African historical and social lenses

SBAHLE DUMAKUDE

THE Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Engagement and Transformation, Professor Bryon Brown, in partnership with the Employee Wellness Unit, hosted the inaugural Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) seminar under the theme: "Influences of Western modernity and culture on GBVF in African cultures".

The seminar aimed to unpack three critical subthemes, each addressed by distinguished researchers.

Dr Ndumiso Dladla from the University of Pretoria explored "Rewriting the narrative: Understanding GBVF through the lens of colonial history".

Dr Sithuthukile Myeni from UNIZULU's Department of Social Work presented on "The role of Africans in challenging western systems that contribute to GBVF".

A panel discussion featuring esteemed scholars tackled the third subtheme: "A future-focused approach - reimagining innovative solutions to end GBVF in the African context".

The event featured powerful and thought-provoking presentations that sparked deep interest and reflection among attendees, particularly around the historical roots of GBVF.

In his opening address, Prof Brown highlighted the gravity of gender-based



Professor Bryon Brown, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Engagement and Transformation. | Xolani Ncube

violence and femicide in South Africa. He reminded attendees that they were not gathered merely as members of an academic institution, but as a united community determined to confront one of the most pressing social crises of their time. He stressed that this issue cannot be downplayed or softened. Citing a 2024 report, Prof Brown noted that South Africa's femicide rate is among the highest in the world - approximately six times the global average. Between July and September of that year alone, 957 women were reportedly murdered by their partners, and more than 10 000 rape cases were recorded. He emphasised that in the South African context,

women remain the primary victims of lifelong physical violence.

"GBVF is not a hypothetical social (issue); it is real, it is personal, it is societal. It affects our campuses, our homes, our place of work, our place of entertainment and our communities. In the past, it used to happen behind closed doors but now it occurs in the open. Perpetrators have become emboldened, fearless despite our spirit of collectivism and ubuntu as African people," said Prof Brown.

The keynote address by Dr Dladla firstly embarked on a historical exploration of gender relations in African societies, grounding insights in ancestral knowledge and cultural artefacts. This foundational approach emphasised that gender dynamics have long been central to African societal organisation, even before colonial disruptions.

The speaker drew inspiration from the work of MSE elder and historian, Cheikh Anta Diop - particularly his text *The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical African Society*. This work forms part of a broader collection titled "The Unity of Precolonial Black Africa", which challenges colonial narratives by demonstrating the historical unity and complexity of African civilisations.

Central to the address was the idea that African cultures evolved in

response to their environments. In regions with abundant resources such as fertile land and domesticable animals, societies developed egalitarian structures, communal living and extended family systems. These cultures were not driven by private property or rigid inheritance laws, but rather by shared responsibility and generosity - values reflected in practices like polygamy, polyandry and communal child-rearing.

The speaker contrasted this with the development of cultures in harsher northern climates, where scarcity led to more individualistic and property-focused social systems. This environmental lens offered a powerful framework for understanding the roots of African gender relations and the divergence from Western nuclear family models.

Ultimately, the keynote called for a deeper engagement with African gender studies rooted in indigenous knowledge systems and historical context. It challenged prevailing stereotypes and emphasised the importance of reclaiming African intellectual traditions to better understand contemporary social issues.

"The difference of about 14 years in life expectancy between black and white people is not a result of nature. There is nothing in the biological makeup of black people that causes them to die sooner. It has to do with nutrition; it has to do with clean air; and it has to

do with the openness to violence - to long-term violence. All of this comes as a result of the historical problems in the country and the failure to address them. And I'm saying that the price, the sacrifice, the transition, the price for this peace is those 20 000 people who die. Amongst those people are our sisters, mothers, and daughters, who make up a portion of this subsidy of death that provides for South Africa. Until we address the fundamental issue of what causes this violence, this is going to continue. We can give speeches, we can produce laws, but the thing that sustains this death, this cheating, and this violence is political, and it is the failure to address the injustice of conquest in an unjust war," emphasised Dr Dladla.

In her closing remarks, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, Prof Nokuthula Kunene reflected on the seminar's key insights. She emphasised that addressing GBVF requires more than surface-level solutions - it demands a deep, systematic understanding of the issue. Prof Kunene noted that while current discussions often focus on the visible symptoms of GBVF, there is a need to holistically consider its historical and structural roots. Without acknowledging the original causes embedded in colonial and cultural systems, efforts to combat GBVF risk being incomplete.

UNIZULU competes in Cars4Mars Challenge

NALEDI HLEFANE

TWO fourth-year mechanical engineering students represented the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) in the recent Cars4Mars African Rover Challenge Competition finals held in Johannesburg.

Njabulo Molife and Tshiane Mphaphuli, together with their fellow competitors, were tasked with building a small, high-tech rover prototype with wireless operation capabilities and an independent power source (battery).

The first stage of the competition involved building the prototype as well as submitting a written report detailing the project strategy and a five-minute video showcasing the functions of the prototype. The latter included demonstrating various functions such as forward and backward movement, turning to avoid obstacles, transporting a 1kg object in an onboard container, and driving on difficult terrain like rocks, hills and sand.

Mechanical engineering lecturer, Riaan Fourie supervised the team and explained that the rover was initially built using plastic tube and based on Arduino coding. "The final design was made of aluminium tube and had six 3D printed wheels, two Arduinos and a camera module. The final rover could be controlled by a cellphone to feed back live camera images of its surroundings," he added.

The UNIZULU team performed exceptionally in the first round, comfortably earning a spot in the finals where the best prototypes had to complete a rigorous obstacle course.

The day before the finals, however, the UNIZULU team experienced technical issues with its rover. This ultimately hindered its overall performance on the Mars track. The team eventually received

the Perseverance award for its fortitude.

Mphaphuli said the experience of participating in this competition taught her the importance of perseverance and adaptability in overcoming technical challenges.

"Participating in the competition was a challenging yet transformative experience. At times it felt overwhelming and I doubted my abilities. However, pushing through the difficulties not only helped me grow as an individual, but also taught me valuable lessons about grit, adaptability and the importance of staying committed to my goals. I'm proud of myself and my teammate for seeing it through," she said.

According to Molife, taking part in the Cars4Mars competition as just a team of two was both challenging and rewarding. Making smart design choices

by prioritising simplicity in order to meet the set deadlines proved beneficial. "This pushed us to become more resourceful and to learn new skills quickly - from troubleshooting mechanical issues to wiring and testing systems ourselves. Working so closely together taught us how to communicate openly, share the workload fairly and keep each other motivated when things got tough," Molife highlighted.

To circumvent the technical shortcomings of the rover next year, Fourie said the Department of Engineering will ensure to build a UNIZULU track where participating teams would be required to run multiple tests ahead of competing in the finals.

The team expressed their gratitude to the university community for the financial and moral support.



The UNIZULU rover was among the competitors in the Cars4Mars African Rover Challenge Competition finals held in Johannesburg. It was built using aluminium tube and had six 3D printed wheels, two Arduinos and a camera module. | Xolani Ncube

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