

UNIZULU TERTIARY TIMES

Celebrating Professor Xoliswa

Mtose's contribution to higher education

NOMUSA MANGXA

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) hosted a historical colloquium this month in honour of its outgoing Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Xoliswa Mtose, under the theme: "Stepping on shifting stones of reclaiming and remaking of African authenticity: Reflections on higher education temporal spaces in the 21st Century".

The gathering celebrated Prof Mtose's immense contribution to the higher education sector and her transformative leadership at UNIZULU, particularly her role in advancing decolonisation and positioning the institution as a node for African thought. Her tenure concludes on March 31, 2026 – marking the closing of a remarkable chapter in the university's history.

Held at King Bhekuzulu Hall, the event drew distinguished guests including Judge Mandlenkosi Motha; Dr Muzi Sikhakhane from the Pan African Bar Association of South Africa; Professor Josiah Lebakeng from the Thabo Mbeki African School, Unisa; Nomarashiya Caluza, former university Council Chairperson; executive and senior management as well as UNIZULU student leadership. Also in attendance were Science, Technology and Innovation Deputy Minister, Dr Nomalungelo Gina and representatives from the Human Rights Commission. Other notable participants joined virtually from Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Finland; Pennsylvania State University,



Outgoing UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Xoliswa Mtose. | James Thwala

USA; and Temple University, USA.

Launched in November 2022, A Node for African Thought seeks to transform education by grounding curriculum, research and community engagement in African history and identity. It also aims to reclaim knowledge disrupted by colonisation and restore African intellectual traditions through collaborative, community-focused efforts.

In his welcome and introductory remarks, programme director Prof Siph

Sepe reflected on UNIZULU's journey; noting that the colloquium affirmed the university's struggle for epistemic freedom. "There is no social justice without epistemic justice and epistemic freedom. UNIZULU has chosen not to outsource the writing of its story. This colloquium is a testimony of collective resilience, visionary strategy and unwavering commitment," he said.

Dr Gina highlighted UNIZULU's key achievements under Prof Mtose's leadership. "During the tenure of Pro-

fessor Mtose, the University of Zululand experienced a period of significant institutional recovery, growth and strategic transformation. Over the past decade, the university expanded its academic offerings, strengthened global partnerships and enhanced both research and infrastructure capacity," she said.

"These efforts contributed to repositioning the institution as a stable, credible and forward-looking university. Under her leadership, the university expanded its global partnerships, gained accreditation for 49 academic programmes, including the introduction of engineering programmes. Under Prof Mtose, the university has also seen massive expansion of its infrastructure. I was privileged to be part of the unveiling of some of the new buildings last year."

Speakers praised Prof Mtose's visionary leadership. Dr Sikhakhane described her as "a legend, mentor, pathfinder, thought leader and icon – the first vice-chancellor to have broken free from the neoliberal logic of education".

Prof Kevin Durrheim, from Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, commended her resilience to "build an authentic African university, A Node for African Thought – not by copying the West but by thinking from the South". He added that under her leadership, the institution had undergone four stages of resuscitation, renewal, resilience and reinvention.

Prof Lebakeng emphasised that inau-

gurating A Node for African Thought was an act of resistance against the dominance of Western knowledge.

Students and staff echoed these sentiments, recognising Prof Mtose's leadership as transformative rather than merely administrative. In her closing remarks, Prof Mtose expressed her gratitude to all those gathered – not only for celebrating her journey at UNIZULU but for also honouring her broader contribution in higher education. With conviction, she extended a clarion call to everyone to dedicate themselves to building a bastion of authentic African scholarship that will make a meaningful contribution to everyday challenges, locally and globally.

"Before I close, I must acknowledge and thank God. Every step of the way, he has walked with me. There were moments I looked back and wondered 'How did I get through?' My faith reminds me that when God planted me here, He planted me for a reason. He gave me His word and He kept His word. Today, I am still standing, by God's grace," she concluded.

Incoming Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Nokuthula Kunene offered a heartfelt vote of thanks, describing the colloquium as a moment of reflection, affirmation and intellectual renewal.

The day concluded with a celebratory gala dinner at the BON Hotel in Richards Bay – marking not only the end of an era, but also a renewed commitment to African scholarship and authenticity.

Fourth Annual Life Orientation Teachers Seminar: empowering educators

NTOMBEZHLE ZWANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU), through its Communications and Marketing Division (CMD) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in the King Cetshwayo District (KCD), recently hosted a successful fourth Annual Life Orientation Teachers Seminar.

Held at the BON Hotel in Empangeni, the seminar was attended by about 80 educators, faculty representatives and stakeholders.

It aimed to update Life Orientation educators on new developments within the university curriculum, while also creating a meaningful platform for dialogue, collaboration and alignment between UNIZULU and schools within the district. The programme also addressed key issues affecting learners in schools, including emotional stress, strategies educators can employ to build trust with learners, bullying and strategies to address it, as well as the role of teachers as career advisors.

The attendees received a hearty welcome from Dr Monument Makhanya, Acting Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law.

"Your presence here affirms the shared commitment to shaping the futures of our learners and strengthening the pathways between schooling and higher education," he said.

He added that Life Orientation educators occupy a uniquely strategic position in the education system. They are not only teachers of the subject but are also mentors, guides, career advisors, counsellors, and often the first line of support for learners navigating complex academic and personal decisions.

During his remarks, DBE Chief Education Specialist Tony Moodley commended the teachers for their contribution and the role they play in shaping aspirations, boosting confidence and assisting learners in



Held at the BON Hotel in Empangeni, the fourth Annual Life Orientation Teachers Seminar was well attended by educators, faculty representatives and stakeholders. | James Thwala

making informed career decisions. "The role you play is not taken lightly. LO is not just about career awareness; it is about ensuring that we prepare learners for the future. You may not always get a thank you; but remember that you are our nation-builders and unsung heroes. Your contribution is appreciated," he said.

Teachers were encouraged to start career conversations as early as grades 8 and 9, and to integrate discussions about local industry and emerging technologies into their lessons.

Clinical psychologist, Professor Jabulani Thwala reminded educators that their job is to nurture young minds and ensure that they find the right path to flourish. "Make sure that you do not discourage them. Instead, equip them with the right tools to make informed decisions," he said.

The three faculties participating in the seminar gave detailed presentations on available courses for prospective students and the possible career paths available after completion of their studies.

Eshika Naidoo, Central Application Office (CAO) representative, provided educators with in-depth information on the university application process. She also highlighted their role in assisting prospective students with submitting applications to various higher education institutions through a centralised system, which is easily accessible and efficient for learners. She further encouraged teachers to guide grade 12 learners through the application process.

In closing, Public Relations Officer, Nompilo Dlamini thanked UNIZULU's executive management, DBE and stakeholders for supporting this initiative.

UNIZULU graduate's journey from student hustle to business success

SBHAHLE DUMAKUDE

WHEN Yoliswa Cele, chief hairdresser and owner of LASA Beauty Lounge, completed her degree at the University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) Faculty of Education in 2017, she imagined her future unfolding in a classroom – chalk in hand, shaping young minds and contributing meaningfully to South Africa's education system.

However, her journey at UNIZULU had given her more than academic knowledge; it had nurtured resilience, creativity and the confidence to pursue opportunities beyond the lecture hall.

Cele was born and raised in Durban's KwaMashu township where she grew up under the care of her single mother. She later moved to Empangeni to live with her older sister and completed her matric at Thanduyise High School.

Long before she dreamt of becoming a teacher, Cele carried with her a lifelong gift: the art of hair braiding. What began as a childhood passion became a reliable side hustle during her university years. Styling hair for fellow students, and even one of her lecturers, not only sustained her but also revealed her entrepreneurial potential.

"I used to do hair for fellow students. I even did one of my lecturer's hair once. She encouraged me to consider opening a salon; but at that time, I didn't take it seriously. In my mind, I was going to be a teacher soon," Cele recalled.

Years later, those words resurfaced – reminding her that UNIZULU had not only prepared her for the classroom but had also instilled the courage to create opportunities when none were offered. That memory became the spark that lit an entirely new path for her.

Venturing into business wasn't smooth. Finding a suitable space for her salon proved challenging, forcing her to move her setup multiple times. "It was tough; but it taught me that in life, you must think outside the box to survive. Qualifications are important, but they are not the only way to build a future."

Her business soon became more than a livelihood. Understanding the frustration



Yoliswa Cele's journey at UNIZULU gave her the confidence to forge her own path as an entrepreneur. | Xolani Ncube

of joblessness, Cele shaped her salon into a place of empowerment; opening doors not only to clients but also to students and graduates looking to gain skills, confidence and a chance to earn a living.

What brings Cele the greatest joy is witnessing transformation – not just in hairstyles, but in people.

"It warms my heart when a client becomes a business partner," she said with pride. "It shows I've impacted her life and maybe even inspired her."

Cele often reminds young people to overcome *abantu bazothini* syndrome – the fear of what others will say. "It's harder to sit at home without a job. Rather start something that will put food on the table than fall into depression," she advised.

Her message to students and graduates is clear: be flexible, be brave and be willing to build your own doors when none open for you.

"Your qualification doesn't guarantee immediate employment. You must be ready for anything. Some people who graduated after me found jobs quickly, while others like me created their own paths. Both journeys are valid."

Looking ahead, Cele's mission extends beyond business growth. She wants her journey to empower others fighting poverty and unemployment, "one hairstyle, one lesson and one opportunity at a time".

For her, UNIZULU was not just a place for academic learning but a community that nurtured courage, creativity and resilience – qualities that continue to shape her success today.

A NODE FOR AFRICAN THOUGHT



University of Zululand

@UNIZULUongoye

@unizulu_official

UNIZULU Official

www.unizulu.ac.za

@unizulu_official



UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

A NODE FOR AFRICAN THOUGHT