

Joy and jubilation at historic ceremony

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IT WAS an exciting day at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University yesterday, the first graduation ceremony since the separation of the then Medical University of Southern Africa from the University of Limpopo in 2014.

"There is no better way to celebrate this landmark occasion than to confer 1 268 undergraduate and post-graduate degrees and diplomas," said the Interim Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chris de Beer.

He said the achievements of their students always brought joy, pride and gratitude and today our students "deserve the centre stage".

One of the top students to be capped was Abel Letoaba, a 22-year-old Bachelor of Sciences (Computer and Mathematical science) Cum Laude graduate.

Letoaba passed matric with only one distinction, but became a totally different person at university by obtaining distinctions in seven out of 10 first-year modules and six As in his second-year modules.

Letoaba, who comes from a middle-class family of nine in Mpumalanga, told the Pretoria News yesterday he was the only one in his area to go to university and had no idea where to begin.



Graduates of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University during the university's first separate graduation ceremony.

PICTURE: OUPA MOKOEN

He said he could not believe that he had come this far, with all the difficulties of balancing his social life and studies.

"I did not know anyone and no one knew me, it was just a big independent world," said Letoaba.

Although he struggled to blend in, he said he had always kept his head high and focused solely on getting his degree. "For the past three years, my life was all about, class, library and study hall," he said.

Obakeng Ramokone, 22, was also

among the 997 undergraduates.

She pursued a Bachelor of Sciences (Molecular and Life Sciences) degree, Ramokone, from North West, said she was raised by her grandmother after her mother passed on in 2000.

She said what encouraged her was her grandmother's phone calls. "I know the struggle of getting a degree, so when my granny would call me just to ask how I was keeping up and that I should persevere, that would literally get me out of bed to

start studying," she said.

She said one of the challenges was when she would be given a 10-chapter scope for a test, and only two chapters would be featured.

"It has been very tough and challenging. No being spoon fed," she said.

Her achievement meant so much more to her family than to her, she added. "My getting a stable career means I will be able to help my family have a comfortable life." "The graduation ceremony was also

attended by the young South African scientist, Dr Sandile Ngcobo.

Ngcobo encouraged the graduates to either go big or go home.

"Do not be afraid to fail. Failure is just a learning experience on how to do things correctly.

"Take professional chances, it's a mean world out there. All the things you all desire in your hearts are already yours."

He concluded by advising them not to seek just to live, but to make a difference.