SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

FOCUS on SMU

NEWSLETTER / Volume 5 / 5th Edition | *june 2020*

Congratulations
Prof Peter A. Mbati
New SMU Vice-Chancellor

Prof Peter Mbati assumed his responsibilities as the new Vice Chancellor of the university on 01 June 2020. He has made clear his intentions to make a significant contribution towards making SMU even more sustainable and stable. “I am indeed excited to be joining SMU as Vice-Chancellor on a five-year term. I would like to thank the Council of the University for having bestowed its trust in me, and will do my very best to lead the institution guided by the values of diligence, commitment, humility, respect, integrity, relevance and transformative leadership. I find people here to be very warm and welcoming and will be interacting with most of you and the University structures and alumni in the coming weeks and months.

The new VC also acknowledged the work and efforts of his predecessors and committed to build from where they finished. “Together with all of you, I intend to build on the good work and foundation laid by my predecessors, including Prof O Ayo-Yusuf, while seeking to improve the operating model of the University to be financially sustainable; and changing the institutional culture to be more inclusive for both staff, students and alumni. In respect of the academic project of the University, and seeing that we are to a large extent a teaching institution, we shall work together to improve our performance in both online and contact teaching in order to improve our student success rate, whilst also improving the University’s excellence in research and social responsiveness,” said the new VC.

Prof Mbati is no stranger to challenges; given the current external Higher Education and Covid-19 environments, he will be straight in the deep end of life at SMU. “In spite of the challenges, either perceived or real, we will work together in the current environment to rebuild a humanizing, caring and compassionate spirit at SMU, whilst also protecting and promoting the SMU brand. We shall together sharpen our response to COVID-19. I am really glad to be part of the SMU community at this critical phase of its development and growth and look forward to working with all of you”, Prof Mbati concluded.

June 16, *Youth Day*
Youth Power:
Growing South Africa together in the period of Covid-19

#YouthMonth2020 #YouthPower #StayHome #StaySafe

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University | @SMU_SA | smu__sa | SMU TV

SMU 2015 - 2020 5 years Anniversary

IN THIS EDITION

Congratulations Prof Peter A. Mbati, new SMU Vice-Chancellor p1
Dr Tshepo Ramarumo - The Statistician P2
SMU Produces New Cohort ofPublic Health Professionals p3
Flu shot amid the COVID-19 pandemic p3
Livhuwani Tshivhase – Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing p4
Congratulations Dr Rebecca Mhlongo, the Physicist p5
Mental Health Impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19) p6

Dr Tshepo Ramarumo - The Statistician

By Tumelo Moila

SMU Statistics Lecturer and alumna, Dr Tshepo Ramarumo, is a true reflection of a statistician, who relentlessly focus on data analysis, decision making and forecasting. Recently, she obtained a PhD degree, titled: 'A statistics evidenced an operational model for improving throughput with extended BSc programme'.

Her personal experience, both as a student and lecturer, led to the selection of the research title. "It has been observed that performance levels showed bypass rates in the science departments for the Bachelor of Science (BSc) degrees in South Africa are not uniformly satisfactory across all the departments and modules. The problem is that students from the first year of the BSc Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) seem to struggle more compared to their counterparts in first year BSc degree (mainstream) when they attend joint classes, at second-year levels of the BSc programme," explains Ramarumo.

She applied scientific methods to reach the results, which compared the admission requirements of several universities that offer BSc ECP and the pass rates. "I explored the conditions of their tuition models and the layout of the extended programme. Assessment methods were also investigated, as well as the teaching methods used. The study was supported with modern theories of science education, mathematical methods and statistical tests to develop a model that can allow gradual development of students recruited to the ECP, which enables ECP students in exactly the same lectures with the mainstream students and under the same lecturers," edifies Ramarumo.

She further emphasised that the difference in the new model would restrict first time entry to exactly two tactically chosen modules and then three in the second year level. "Such a model would also be supported by more revision during the time the mainstreamers are attending to other modules, using the ECP dedicated lecturers to conduct reinforcements and extra exercises. Benefits of the model would then offset the lapse in knowledge continuation when BSc ECP III joins the BSc II groups for the remaining levels of the programmes," she said.

Her affiliation with statistics commenced during her second year level of BSc ECP studies. "I got the opportunity to register statistics and realised this is the career I want to follow and focus more on Mathematical Statistics. I was encouraged by what I saw statisticians do with maths knowledge, such as data analysis, decision making and forecasting," recollects Ramarumo.

"The skills I acquired through my course work and practical made me realise that I need to learn more. At the time I was doing undergraduate and BSc Honours, we were taught by lecturers who demonstrated diversity that I felt was good in developing me as a statistician and statistics academic,'' said Ramarumo, in response to why she loves and remain loyal to SMU.

"My former Head of Department, Dr Marcus Motshwane believed in me and said that I had the potential to grow as a statistician. He appointed me as a Junior Lecturer while I was busy with my BSc Honours in Statistics degree. That made me realise that I can do more and register for the Master's studies, and thereafter PhD degree," said Ramarumo, who is a part-time interior and exterior designer, during her spare time.

In 2017, she received the Maryam Babangida Prize for Best Woman in Post Graduate studies. "I got the highest marks from my research dissertation among all the women MSc graduates of that year's graduation. To be honest, I was shocked in that graduation ceremony as I was not even aware of it," said Ramarumo, a former undergraduate merit bursary holder.

"My sincere gratitude to Almighty God; my supervisor Prof Solly Seeletse, and Dr Mantepu MaseTshaba; my dearest colleagues at SMU; my sister and colleague, Lebogang Sesale in particular, who supported me for all my years in academia and from my student days. It will be impossible to name everyone though, but I thank you all," concluded Ramarumo.

Dr Modjadji, in the middle flanked by graduates

SMU Produces New Cohort of Public Health Professionals

By Tumelo Moila

The recently held SMU virtual graduation ceremonies, were able to produce a total of 33 Masters of Public Health (MPH) graduates. Equipped with requisite skills for the fight against the pandemic, the University pride itself in training the cohort of experts at a crucial time. "It is fulfilling to mentor students, and be part of their interest and goals, as they become a reality. On the other hand, one advances as an academic. It is not an easy journey, to deal with different candidates. It requires selflessness, and patience, but it is worth it. It is a plus to the department as well, and of course, it benefits the institution by adding to its throughput," said Dr Perpetua Modjadji, who supervised six of the graduates.

In the midst of COVID-19 pandemic, the expertise of Public Health graduates is vital in containing the spread of the pandemic. "Graduating for MPH degree, is a dream come true, after obtaining my postgraduate diploma in Public Health, here at SMU, 2017. I can't explain how grateful I am for working hard, under the circumstances, having to balance my work, studies and family. My appreciation goes to the Department of Public Health, for the knowledge they are imparting to postgraduate students. Above all, my gratitude goes to my supervisor Dr Perpetua Modjadji, for her support, patience and tough love. I could have never asked for a better supervisor. She is godsend. The tassel was definitely worth the hassle," says Mpinane Makhoathi-Pitso, one of the graduates, and also a personal assistant (PA) of the office of the DVC: Research, Postgraduate Studies & Innovation.

The degree of MPH offered at SMU, entails various disciplines, which mainly are Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Environmental Health and Occupational Health, Social and Behavioural Science, and Health Systems Management and Policy. In addition, the research methods component, enable students to embark on research project of Public Health under supervision, and produce a dissertation. "I am humbled to have been under the supervision of Dr Modjadji, and completing my MPH degree on record time. From her, I have learned that hard work, dedication and commitment pays off. Through this process, I am proud to indicate that the department of Public Health with supervisors like Dr Modjadji, is committed to produce upcoming researchers, and make a difference to our health system and academic life in general," said Dineo Molokwane, another 2020 MPH graduate.

Flu shot amid the COVID-19 pandemic

Why should I get the flu shot now, when it doesn't protect against COVID-19?
Flu causes severe illness and death, with >11 000 South Africans dying from flu annually. Flu vaccination doesn't protect against COVID-19, but it prevents complications and superinfections, which could overwhelm our already strained healthcare system.

Who needs the flu shot the most?
Ideally everybody aged >6 months should be vaccinated for "herd immunity", in order to surround and protect those who cannot be vaccinated (babies <6 months; allergic to vaccine components) from coming into contact with infected people. Healthcare workers at higher risk of flu exposure and those at higher risk of serious flu complications (aged >65 years; children <2years; immunocompromised; pregnant; chronic lung, heart, renal diseases; diabetics; tuberculosis) should be prioritised for vaccination.

I got the flu shot last year. Should I get it again?
YES! Flu viruses mutate and change constantly. The annual vaccine protects against viruses predicted to be circulating each winter.

Winter has started – is it too late to vaccinate?
The flu vaccine is best given before winter starts, as your body takes two weeks to develop protective antibodies. However, it is never too late to vaccinate for protection during the rest of winter.

Are flu shot side effects worse than getting the flu?
Serious reactions to the flu shot are very rare. The worst common side effects are a sore arm or redness, and a slight fever and body aches; these will subside within 2 days.

Can I get flu because of the flu shot? NO! The flu shot is inactivated and does not contain any live viruses.

Why did I get sick after my last flu shot?
The average incubation period for flu is 2 days, hence you might

have contracted flu before getting your flu shot. Also, many respiratory illnesses occurring in winter have similar symptoms, and are often mistaken for flu. Finally, flu shot side-effects (mild fever and body aches) may be wrongly perceived as flu.

I am feeling sick. Can I receive the flu shot?
If you have a mild cold, then yes. But not if you have fever, or moderate/severe acute illness, with or without fever or requiring antibiotics.

Is it safe to get the flu shot while pregnant or when breastfeeding?
YES! Mothers pass flu antibodies to the developing foetus, and through breast milk, protecting infants for the first six months of life, when they are too young to be vaccinated but are at high risk of flu complications.

I am allergic to eggs. Can I get the flu shot?
You can get the flu shot if you have a mild egg allergy (experienced only urticaria or hives). The flu shot is contraindicated if you have a history of severe (anaphylactic) hypersensitivity or allergic reaction to the vaccine or any vaccine component, egg and chicken proteins.

How can I further protect myself against flu this winter?
Similar to COVID-19, good hygiene is the first line of defense to keep germs at bay. Avoid contact with people who have the flu, wash your hands often, cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing, avoid touching your face, stay home when you are sick, clean and disinfect surfaces and shared items.

Getting the flu shot must be a collective effort from all of us, to protect not only yourself, but also those around you.

Prepared by Prof Hannelie Meyer and Prof Rose Burnett

Livhuwani Tshivhase – Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing

By Tumelo Moila

Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing, Livhuwani Tshivhase, previously worked as a domestic worker at a very young age, in exchange for tuition fees. "When I was a learner at Tshitandani Primary School, I had to work as a domestic worker from nine to thirteen years, so that my school fees are paid. During my learning years at Phophi Secondary School, I used to collect wood and sell to my principal, so that I was able to pay my school fees," said Dr Tshivhase, who recently graduated during the SMU Virtual Graduation ceremonies.

Her dissertation for Doctor of Philosophy qualification, is titled: *A model to promote the implementation of integrated management of childhood illnesses (IMCI) in Vhembe district, Limpopo Province.* "I was motivated to choose a topic in community health because the programmes that were rolled-out twenty years ago, were not being implemented, and nothing was done as an intervention. I then developed a model with the hope it will promote the programme/strategy use, as participants, who are managers and implementers, could diagnose and solve the ailments or suggest ways to curb the challenges,'' said Tshivhase, a lecturer at the SMU Nursing department.

"As a lecturer, I teach students about nursing care of patients in primary health care settings, hospitals, as well as communities. I supervise students for master's research, and also moderate formative and summative assessment for students in nursing. Currently, I am teaching final year nursing students, unit management, teaching, ethos and professional practice. In addition, I facilitate learning for the final year students in inter-professional education collaborative (IPEC) initiative." she said.

Her career as an academic, emanated after asking someone working at the university, on how one can become a lecturer. "She told me that I need to have experience as an educator, or previously taught students at nursing college, and be a holder of Master's degree. Even after obtaining the Master's degree, it was not easy, until I saw a new Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) vacancy advertised at SMU. In 2016, I joined SMU, concurrently, became a lecturer and post-graduate student. I completed my PhD in 2019, and graduated virtually in 2020," explains Tshivhase.

Her future career prospects include becoming a head of department. "I want to see myself managing a department, and improving the life of students by making sure the environment is conducive for their learning. I will also be conducting a lot of research and publishing more articles. Presently, I am reading articles on Covid-19, hoping to compile a systemic review on compliance to guidelines, to prevent spread, and flattening the curve. As an SMU alumna, I value this university very much. It moulded me to be a professional that I am today, and want to share my expertise, with students from destitute backgrounds, and empower them like the way I was empowered," envisage Tshivhase.

Growing up in a rural village of Tshamulungwi (Buluni), in Venda, Dr Tshivhase was only familiar with nursing and teaching professions. "In my village, there was no nurse, and I wanted to help my people. I remember when I was in grade two, I had sores around my neck and my teacher told me to stay home since I was ill, and I needed to attend school desperately. The sores made me to think of being a nurse who will cure people's wounds as it was preventing me to go to school. Today, I am a Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing, and able to financially support three families at my village," concluded Tshivhase.

Congratulations
Dr Rebecca Mhlongo, the Physicist

By Tumelo Moila

'Don't call yourself a Physicist unless you have a PhD', these words encouraged SMU Physics' acting Head of Department (HoD), Dr Rebecca Mhlongo, to work hard and attain her PhD qualification. "I always wanted to be a scientist that is why I enrolled for Bachelor of Science (BSc) at the University of North West. It all started in grade 10 when we were choosing our preferred subjects. I chose Mathematics and Physical Sciences because of my teachers who believed that I can do well in those subjects. I was doing very well in Maths and loved it more than Physics. Funny enough, during my first year of studies, tables turned and started falling in love with Physics than Maths, and the rest is history,'' recalls Dr Mhlongo.

Furthermore, two prominent academics motivated her to be counted in the exclusive group of female Physicists. "During my undergraduate studies, I was concerned about the number of few females in the Physics career, and I told myself that I want to be one of those few. I was motivated by female Physicists such as Prof Mmantsae Diale and Prof Nnenesi Kgabi, and because of them, I am a PhD graduate," she reminisces.
Dr Mhlongo was among more than 1 000 qualifying candidates, who recently graduated during the first-ever virtual graduation ceremonies, held by her employer, SMU. Her PhD qualification titled: 'Synthesis and Characterization of mixed phases of $ZnAl_2O_4/ZnO/SrAl_2O_4/Sr_3Al_2O_6$ activated with foreign ions using sol-gel and chemical bath deposition methods', was conferred in absentia, due to the lockdown regulations that enforces social distancing, in an effort to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. "I tried pursuing my PhD on several fields in physics such as Astrophysics, Physics Education and Theoretical Physics, until Professor SV Motloung introduced me to Condensed Matter Physics (CMP), particularly the synthesis of luminescence materials. In 2017, I switched from Theoretical Physics to CMP for my PhD studies, and I don't regret doing that," recalls Mhlongo.

"With my PhD thesis, I have contributed to a new body of knowledge on the use of the sol-gel and chemical bath deposition methods. My research project is unique because it focuses on the mixed phases (which is complex), compared to the single phase materials. It aligns itself to the South African Nanotechnology strategy from the South African government, which shows the obligation towards nanotechnology. To date, my research has contributed three publications in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and South African Post School Education (SAPSE) accredited journals," said an ecstatic Mhlongo.

Making a difference in someone's life fulfils Dr Mhlongo. "My purpose is to impart knowledge. There are three things that I consider as highlights of my lecturing career. Firstly, when my Master of Science student got an award for the best poster presenter at South Africa Institute of Physics in 2019; secondly, four of my honours students graduated with cum-laude endorsements during the 2020 SMU virtual graduation ceremonies; and last but not least, former students contact me to share their good progress in their careers because of my guidance," said Dr Mhlongo, who regard the National Research Foundation (NRF) Thuthuka bursary awarded to her in 2018, as her biggest career highlight.

Her role as the acting HoD comes with challenges. "To be honest, being the HoD has many challenges. You deal with students' problems, not only academic but also socio-economic matters," said a worried Mhlongo.

Her future plans entail collaborations with researchers who will contribute to her growth in the Physics field, and build a strong nanophosphor material research group in the department of Physics. "I will also like to contribute towards the vision and mission of SMU by developing nanophosphor material that will be applicable in the medical field. For medical diagnostics, broad-band light sources in infrared range are critical in identifying physiological information of tissues,'' envisages Mhlongo.

Mental Health Impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is a crisis for all of us. It poses significant risks to public health and we are all challenged by it. While people vary in their responses to a crisis, the prolonged stress and uncertainty of COVID-19 is likely to impact on the mental health and wellbeing of many people.

Infectious illness, like any other stressor, challenges the way we cope, it creates anxiety and susceptibility to mental health problems.

What are the potential mental health impacts of COVID-19 during lockdown?

- Fear for one's own health and fear of infecting others
- Increased anxiety and worry for self and others
- Thinking about or watching too much news or social media on COVID-19
- Major changes in normal daily routine and functioning
- Sleeping poorly (too much or too little)
- Not wanting to get out of bed
- Difficulty concentrating on your studies, work or daily activities
- Easily distracted
- Avoiding others, even within confines of social distancing
- Experiencing headaches, stomach problems, neck and back pains
- Increased sadness, anger and loneliness , guilt, helpless, or confused
- Crying spells
- Less taking
- Feeling anxious, depressed or having panic attacks
- Excessive eating
- Increased use of alcohol, cigarettes, or other drugs or taking more
- prescription drugs
- Easily frustrated, lack patience and over protective of loved ones
- Worsening of chronic health problems

How do I know that the distress has become *too* much during the lockdown?

- COVID-19 has led to increased stress for most people
- At one time or another most of us would have had some signs or symptoms of stress, noted by changes in how we think, feel and behave
- However, if you have significant changes in your thoughts, behaviour or emotions and they are *persistent beyond couple of weeks*; *you are unable to go about your daily home, study, work-related activities* permitted under social distancing; *have intense feeling of hopelessness or helplessness, or suicidal thought*, it would be advisable to contact and consult with a health professional such as a psychologist, family GP-doctor, psychiatrist, social worker or other mental health provider

Below are some cost-free psychological services for you to seek support

South African COVID-19 telephone and online mental health support:

- *South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) COVID-19 Mental*
  - *Health* Support Helplines 7 days a week, 24 hours a day (Toll-free)
  - *Phone*: 0800 21 22 23, 0800 70 80 90 or 0800 456 789
  - *Sms*: 32312 or 31393 (a counsellor will call you back)
  - *Suicide Helpline*: 0800 567 567
  - *Online chat: http://www.sadag.org/*

- *Cipla Whatsapp Chat Line* 7 days a week from 9am – 5pm via 076882775 or 0800 456 789

- *DBT Online Support Group*
  - info@dbtinstitute.co.za

- *Lifeline Counselling* 7 days a week, 24 hours a day
  - Telephone: 0861 322 322 or 011 728 1347
  - Lifeline WhatsApp Counselling 065 989 9238
  - Online chat: https://www.lifelinejhb.org.za/index.ashx

- *Mental health call centre*
  - Phone: 021 938 9229
  - Email: mhic@sun.ac.za

What can I do for *self-care* during COVID-19 and the lockdown?

Filter exposure to social media and news

- Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can add to your fear and anxiety
- So, filter what you watching, reading and listening to
- Limit access to accurate and current information from reliable sources.
- Listen to what experts are saying about the virus. Reliable resources such as: -
  - www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019nCoV,
  - www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus2-019,
  - ww.sacoronavirus.co.za,
  - National Department of Health WhatsApp 060 012 3456

Maintain a positive attitude as possible

- The way we think about things can make all of the difference, thus your attitude can help offset many difficult situations

Accept evets out of your control

- When you have given all that you can to a situation, you are able to be expend energy where it can be more effective
- Ask yourself what you can control-your attitude, thinking, home, caring for your body and mind

Create a regular daily routine

- Maintain a daily routine, even if it is different to your normal daily routine.

Connect with family and friends

- Its useful share your feelings and check in on others; having a sense of connection and a feeling of community is essential to coping
- Use technology, such as phone, video chat, email, WhatsApp and other digital modes to reach out
- Talk with people that you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling-even when engaging in social distancing

Be active regularly

- Take care of your body through regular exercises
- Try to eat healthy and well balanced meals
- Get regular and adequate sleep
- Avoid excessive alcohol or drugs or comfort food
- Take deep breaths, stretched, or meditate daily

Have time out

- Create some time out to relax and engage in small but enjoyable daily activities that can help lift your mood.

Reference material and Links to information on COVID-19

- South African Resource Portal COVID-19 https://sacoronavirus.co.za/
- Mental Health Information Centre https://mentalhealthsa.org.za/surviving-the-covid-19-lockdown/
- Psychological Society of South Africa https://www.psyssa.com/
- South African Depression and Anxiety Group http://www.sadag.org/
- World Health Organization (WHO) https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-healthconsiderations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_2
- South African National Institute for Communicable Diseases https://www.nicd.ac.za/
- Psychological First Aid in Ebola outbreak https://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/psychological_first_aid_ebola/en/
- A guide to psychological first aid. For Red Cross and Red Crescent Societieshttp://pscentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PFA-Guide-low-res.pdf Remote Psychological First Aid during COVID-19 outbreakhttp://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Remote-Psychological-First-Aid-during-COVID19.pdf

Compiled for the general public by Dr Antonio G. Lentoor, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Clinical Psychology Department, School of Medicine, SMU, email: antonio.lentoor@smu.ac.za