

## The Neurosurgery Department commences with work to clear **Cranioplasty backlogs**

**T**he department of neurosurgery at SMU and the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital embarked on a cranioplasty week initiative to address backlogs in cranioplasty surgeries. A multi-disciplinary team of surgeons, theatre nurses, registrars and anaesthetists, working in shifts commenced with this drive on the 15<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

Cranioplasty is a type of neurosurgical operation done to repair or correct a defect in the skull. These defects in the bone may be congenital (i.e., people born with a defect in the skull), because of injury/trauma to the head or from a previous operation where a part of the bone from the skull was removed.

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Patients with skull defects may have headaches and, in some cases, neurological impairment which may be relieved after a cranioplasty is done. A skull defect may affect the patient's self-esteem as they may be subjected to teasing by others in their communities especially teenagers and children. As a result, they may find it hard to socialize and often become withdrawn because they do not want to draw attention to themselves. Many patients usually opt to wear caps and hats to try and conceal the defects.

The procedure has cosmetic impact on the head and it involves surgically inserting a synthetic plate such as plastic or metal on top of the defective spot in the skull and covering it up with skin. The size of the plate depends on the nature of the defect in the skull.

The process also involved pre-operative procedures which included CT scans and X-rays of the defects, Blood investigations, COVID-19 tests and relevant consents. Anesthetic pre-operative consultations were conducted with the patients a day before the operations. The registrars were tasked with preparing the patients for theatre (i.e. taking bloods, booking CT scans, checking for underlying infections etc). Dr Mosadi was the liaison between the company producing the cranioplasty material and the patients. Mosadi also constituted the data collection sheets and organised the theatre roster. Dr Dube and Dr Seroto took care of other responsibilities.

The most feared risks associated with this type of surgery are infections on the operation site and development of blood clots in the brain (i.e. epidural and subdural haematoma).

The plate that is inserted is permanent and would only be replaced if the patient develops an infection or requires a re-operation for any reason.

The cranioplasty material used was unique to each individual patient because the size and site of their defects were not the same. Some patients had a molded methyl-methacrylate implant (bone cement) while others received a titanium mesh as an implant. All patients did however have micro plates and screws used to secure the implant in place.

Having a skull defect may also be devastating to a lot of patients economically because they must either stop working or struggle to find work because some employers are uncomfortable with having employees with defects in the skull. A good example is a miner who cannot go underground if part of their brain is "exposed" i.e., only covered by skin.

The surgeries were successfully completed and more people are expected to be operated on. It takes a minimum of a week to recover from the operation. The plan is to follow patients up to a maximum of 3 months after operation.



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# SMU welcomes the looming Institutional Audit



As the oversight and parent body, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) periodically subjects higher education institutions to institutional audits. This is one of the ways through which DHET ensures that these institutions account to the tax payers for the taxes invested in them.

From the 10-14 April 2023, SMU will open its heart and soul, for the first time, to a highly esteemed panel from Council on High Education (CHE) and High Education Quality Committee (HEQC). Dr Britta Zawada, from CHE, recently conducted an audit initiation workshop at the Tsogo Sun in Pretoria following the institutional audit briefing meeting of 09 February 2022 which was chaired by CHE Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr Whitfield Green and attended by SMU Vice-Chancellor, Prof Peter Mbat, and the entire management team.

**The workshop sought to assist SMU to prepare for the coming institutional audit. In a PowerPoint Presentation, Dr Zawada highlighted three themes, namely:**

- The Focus areas of the CHE/HEQC Institutional Audit;
- An Overview of the process of the CHE/HEQC

- Institutional Audit on SMU; and
- Institutional audits, as a reflexive process

The attendees, who included the executive, the academic and administrative staff, welcomed the institutional audit.

“In terms of the approved Framework for Institutional Audits 2021 and Manual for Institutional Audits 2021, the CHE will be conducting institutional audits of all public universities, as well as private higher education institutions, with the first set of audits having commenced in 2021, in accordance with a Council endorsed schedule. The CHE exercises this authority through its permanent subcommittee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The HEQC has three important responsibilities to perform. These are: to promote quality assurance in higher education; accredit higher education programmes, and; audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions”, said Prof Bassy Marvey, the Director for Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance.

Some Schools at SMU have already been involved in CHE processes with the accreditation of their programmes. However,



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the Institutional Audit 2022 focuses on auditing the university's overall quality assurance system, focusing on learning and teaching. It is conducted to determine the coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency of our internal quality assurance system. This includes plans, policies, procedures, processes, mechanisms, and both governance and operational structural arrangements, support and quality assure our core functions in enhancing the students' likelihood of success, and that they are in alignment with the national imperatives. Most importantly, it is a process that enables institutions to identify what they are doing well and to isolate important challenges for continuous improvement, said Prof Marvey, whose office has been assigned to play a liaison role in the audit.

**Following this audit initiation workshop with CHE and the formal institutional commitment to the audit, an Institutional Audit Steering Group (IASG) was established in line with the provisions and guidelines as stipulated in the CHE Manual for Institutional Audits (CHE-MFIA), namely:**

- The institution appoints a steering group of sufficient seniority and with the necessary authority in a manner it determines.
- Its size, composition and terms of reference are determined by the institution, with due regard for the importance attached to an institutional audit and the expertise required to prepare for the audit of the quality management system.
- The steering group is provided with clear terms of reference so that it understands the full spectrum of its responsibilities for the audit, which includes securing internal approval of its submissions to the CHE timeously.
- The institution has also appointed the Director: Institutional Planning & Quality Assurance as the principal point of contact for the CHE (Liaison) regarding all matters relating to the audit. The CHE's audit officer and the institution's contact person are required to maintain regular and direct communication to facilitate the optimal execution of the audit.

**Furthermore, the following key agreements were reached between CHE and SMU:**

1. The University shall submit its Self-Evaluation Report and Portfolio of Evidence to the CHE on or before **30 November 2022**.

2. The site visit of the audit panel shall take place on 10 – 14 April 2023.
3. The programme and schedule for the site visit shall be finalised a month in advance of the agreed-on site visit.
4. The CHE shall provide the draft audit report to the institution no later than three months after the site visit.
5. The CHE shall provide the final audit report to the institution no later than three months after the draft audit report was returned to the CHE.

Whilst SMU is relatively a new institution, it has a rich history from which to draw its experiences. The institutional audit experience drawn from our predecessor Medunsa-UL campus and the recent National Doctoral Review form a good baseline from which to approach this audit, and we are confident that the audit steering group consists of members with sufficient experience and a level of managerial seniority to steer the ship in the right direction.

According to CHE, the assessment of the first round of institutional audits conducted from 2004-2011 concluded that institutional audits were successful mechanisms that added much value to institutional quality assurance. SMU therefore believes that, this institutional audit, by placing emphasis on developmental improvement, will also be successful and add value to it.



# Meet the *newly appointed*

Director of Student Affairs

# Tulani Nkuntse



**T**he newly appointed Director of Student Affairs Mr Tulani Nkuntse says some of his immediate priorities are to focus on how to create a safe space for students to take up opportunities to get their mental health in check; embrace a holistic approach to student development and to improve their overall experience with particular focus on co-curricular activities, how to enhance and improve those; to focus on more leadership programmes; improve the state of sports infrastructure so that the University can generate some income from it and be reinvested in the facilities. He says his major focus on mental health issues is reinforced by the reports that there is a lot of alcohol consumption taking place in residences. He says there is a need to check if students are not using alcohol as a coping mechanism. He wants to foster a culture of conversations around mental health and the various options available for students to deal and cope with the pressures of academia and personal circumstances.

Nkuntse was born in the city of Port Elizabeth (PE) now Gqeberha and his family originally comes from Umtata. He started his schooling in PE and went to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University now Nelson Mandela University (NMU) where he studied a BA majoring in Political Science and Public Administration and proceeded to do an honors degree in Public Administration and later a master's degree at the same University.

At the age of 31, Nkuntse lost his mother in 2007 while still in Grade 10 and at a time when he was highly involved as a young leader in community work. *I served as a peer educator and organized workshops for learners affected and infected by HIV/Aids and this is where I harnessed and developed my leadership skills.*

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He later became head boy at his high school. *I got into a number of leadership positions at University such as being in the house committees, residence student assistant and was employed by student affairs as a Junior Student Life Officer charged with the responsibility of coming up with developmental opportunities for students. I also provided a lot of support working in the Executive Dean of Students for over four years, he recalled.*

Tulani also worked as a lecturer for a period of two and half years at the NMU before he could join Monash South Africa as Student Leadership Officer in 2016. He worked for six months, a period he regards as exciting because they had one office of student affairs, he had an opportunity to be promoted to Senior Residence, Cultural and Leadership Officer within student affairs. *This opportunity allowed me to shape the type of student affairs that I thought was appropriate for that context. At Monash, one got international exposure on student affairs matters.* In 2017, he was appointed Acting Head of Department and in 2018 was appointed Head of Student Affairs following a vigorous process.

He later joined government as an Assistant Director in the Support and Sector Engagement Directorate, a role that gave him an opportunity to work with all public universities in the country and was exposed to the policy environment at national government and how student support and engagement were managed at an institutional level. He was part of the ministerial task team on gender based violence providing secretarial support to the team.

He was later appointed the first ever Deputy Dean of Students at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in January 2020. In January 2022, he was appointed as the Acting Dean of Student Affairs until he joined SMU. He was quick to point out that he was given a position by another different institution but chose SMU. He felt that there was a lot to offer at SMU and what influenced his decision, he had an opportunity to come for a physical interview and had a glimpse of how the institution looked like. He saw a lot of opportunity to develop and make a significant impact inspired by the vision of the University.

Nkuntse regards himself as a champion of student success. His responsibilities include providing oversight to the various

units within student affairs such as student governance, student life, residences, campus health, sports and culture department.

*I need to ensure that the division is able to function and support the academic project and student success so that students can become holistic graduates who espouse the attributes of SMU.*

He acknowledges that there are some infrastructure challenges in residences and hope that the 2000 and 800 beds being built will resolve some of these challenges. However, the Director believes that conversations should take place between student affairs and those charged with the provision of infrastructure around how to modernize the old residences. He intends running competitions for residences to compete for a certain amount to beautify their residences. This will assist them to take care of their facilities.

“

He also wants to focus energy on student entrepreneurship. Nkuntse said, *while preparing for the interview at SMU, I picked documents from the university website that assisted me with preparation and one of those was the University's strategic plan 2021-2025. I picked in the document that SMU openly reflected on its challenges, where it was as well as where the university wanted to go. One of areas identified as a weakness was that students were not taught business and entrepreneurial skills.*

He wants to make a contribution to enhance and strengthen the University in the area of entrepreneurship. We need to establish a coherent programme with particular focus on student entrepreneurship. In the long run the university should have a student entrepreneurial development centre. There is a need to work collaboratively with CUTL and academic departments to create a co-curricular record which will be able to emphasise the importance of the involvement of students beyond the classroom.

In the long term, he wants the University to undertake benchmarking exercise internationally around the area of student affairs in collaboration with the internationalization office especially with other health sciences institutions across the world. Leadership development should be enhanced through the production of short learning programmes to benefit students and communities

The Director encourages students to raise their various issues through proper structures such as the SRC and residence committees and called on those elected to the various structures to report back to their constituencies regularly. *When protocols are properly followed, there will be order and issues will not be raised directly with the Vice-Chancellor unnecessarily - we need to foster such a culture. I also assure the SMU community that I will serve and engage openly and work collaboratively with others to see how best to address students' issues, concluded Nkuntse.*

# SMU recently hosted high level delegation from DHET as part of its monitoring and evaluation responsibilities

SMU Vice-Chancellor Prof Peter Mbati recently hosted a high level delegation from the department of higher education and training led by the Deputy Director General for University Education Dr Marcia Socikwa and the departmental Chief Financial Officer Ms Pretty Makukula. The purpose of the visit was to conduct monitoring and evaluation in particular around projects that are funded by the department.

Prof Mbati expounded that SMU appreciated the substantial support received from the department and that the leadership of the University understood that there must be accountability for every cent spent. Mbati further indicated that while Institutions like SMU had the necessary critical mass to deliver programmes at a high level, they ought to be supplemented by a number of other interventions such as appropriate infrastructure that allows both students and academics to operate in an environment that brings about dignity. He declared that the University will still approach the department for more funding. “We will be coming for more requests for funding because there is so much required at SMU to achieve the vision the leadership has for the University. We also understand that we first have to deliver on what was given to us. One of the conversations that we normally have with the executive team and leadership is to ensure that we account for every cent provided to this institution and also to ensure quality in terms of the final product delivered”, he added.

The DDG Dr Socikwa explained that they visited the University as part of their monitoring and evaluation as they constantly have to report on the work done but also to support SMU in the academic enterprise which remains central to everything the department does. Dr Socikwa underscored that they were imbued by the spirit of compassion as espoused by the first Minister of education in democratic South Africa Professor Sibusiso Bengu in fulfilling the calling on learning and what it means for society. “We also come with great



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appreciation of what university enterprises means from an economic perspective. Universities generate money, they grow economies and communities around them in many ways through development”, she said. Socikwa further stated that they requested their Chief Financial Officer to accompany them on the visit this time around precisely because she signs off approvals and support their efforts as well as for her to have a first view of where the money goes and ensure that value is derived from every cent allocated.

Two important presentations on the ICT refresher project and on infrastructure related projects in the built environment were made. Mr Ignatious Makgoka provided details through his presentation that focused on where the university was in relation to the ICT network infrastructure refresher project. He provided a background that the current university infrastructure had aged to the level where an application for financial assistance had to be made to the department and approval was granted in 2018. He said that by the time the project is completed, there will be an end to end coverage of Wi-Fi for all users including visitors, enhanced levels of ICT governance where proper control to secure the environment are in place. When quizzed about the project end dates by the department, Makgoka explained that the ICT projects were divided into four domains with each having its completion date. According to Makgoka, the data centre is completed and there is a date for cabling completion. He explained that the servers and storage facilities will take three months to deploy once delivered. Makgoka said the ICT network infrastructure remains a critical factor as it supports the academic enterprise and the corporate services.

The second presentation was done by Ms Nangamso Makgoka focusing on infrastructure and the built environment side. She shared with the visitors' progress made on some infrastructure projects funded by DHET and touched on maintenance related issues. She mentioned that some projects have been completed such as the rehabilitation of sporting facilities, the staff cafeteria, supply of high mast lights, security installations such as CCTV system, standby generators and the ring road.

She also focused on major projects that are currently underway such as the water reticulation project. Makgoka said SMU received funding for this project in two phases for consulting and construction and the project is due for completion by end of March 2023. She emphasized that the project will assist the university to overcome the current challenges relating to water and sewer.

Speaking about the premium 2000 beds student accommodation facility funded through DHET and DBSA which is already at construction phase, she highlighted that most blocks of the 2000 beds are already at roof level. She further stressed that there were some delays with commencement of another 800 beds residential facility which is still at planning phase and that various sites are being tested by geologists to determine suitability. She also gave progress about the boundary fencing and wall project which commenced in November 2021 and committed that it will be finished soon. The Acting Director also explained that there are several maintenance projects that are currently in progress.

The CFO Ms Makukule extolled SMU for the work it has managed to do thus far considering where the University came from. “We are pleased with spending on infrastructure particularly since 2021”, said Makukula. She cautioned that going forward it will become more difficult to convince treasury for more funding as the fiscus is under pressure with competing priorities. “We are also aware that the infrastructure needs of universities are way more than the available resources. You need to know that if we appropriate money to institutions and they do not spend, government has to still service the debt”, she said. She also revealed that the department is now focusing on equitable distribution of infrastructure resources across all the sectors of the departments including TVET colleges. The department further called for agile project management to help the university overcome risks associated with projects.

The visitors were taken on a tour of Campus to visit various completed and ongoing projects. This was the second visit by DHET to SMU in a short space of time.

# SMU Virologist & PhD Candidate Varsetile Nkwinika scoops award



**How do you feel about winning the African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM2021) award for best abstract?**

**VN:** I was overwhelmed with emotion when winning the ASLM award for best abstract in November 2021 - mainly pride and delight! It felt like I was in the “winner effect” zone, especially since I had just won First Prize for best postgraduate student oral presentation at the SMU Research Days in August 2021. No doubt, this boosted my confidence, and it fostered a sense of leadership and excellence in my research field. It felt like an acknowledgement of a job well done and justification for the agony, the self-doubt, and the hard work that went into winning the award. “A rising tide lifts all boats”, as the saying goes— looking at it that way, I wanted to turn all these exciting emotions into action after winning the award, which was why I had to share the good news to encourage my peers and those aspiring to walk on the same career path.

**Tell us about the process of participating; how were you selected and eventually declared the winner?**

**VN:** To participate in the ASLM2021 conference, I had to first submit an abstract which was then reviewed by the ASLM Scientific Committee, experts in the field who were responsible for deciding on which abstracts met the stringent scientific ASLM requirements, and then assigning approved abstracts as either a poster or an oral presentation, similar to how we do at our SMU Research Days. The conference abstract submissions were done online on the ASLM

website, and we were notified by email of the abstract submission outcome. I was delighted that not only was my abstract accepted for oral presentation but also that I received complimentary registration to attend the ASLM2021 Conference. After accepting the offer, I was sent guidelines on how to prepare my PowerPoint slide presentation, the presentation duration and how to do a backup recording of the presentation in case of internet issues, as the conference was attended online through the ASLM virtual platform. I prepared my presentation and practised all my notes, ensuring I stuck to the allocated time while getting the message of my presentation across in a succinct manner. I needed to understand my presentation well enough to confidently answer all questions that arose during the Q&A session at the conference. It was nerve wracking, but I enjoyed the experience. I also learned so much from other presenters. When they announced the winners on the last day, I learned that I had won First Prize for best abstract, despite competing with established researchers from all around the world! This was a big deal, especially for an emerging young scientist like myself. I owe my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr Ramokone Lisbeth Lebelo (Senior Lecturer in the Department of Virology and Senior Scientist at the National Health Laboratory Services [NHLS]) for encouraging me to submit my abstract and for believing in me— looking back, I'm glad I took that brave step!

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### Take us through your academic journey with SMU.

**VN:** My academic journey at SMU began in 2015 as a medical laboratory intern in the Department of Virology, funded by a successful application I had made through the Department of Science and Technology (DST)/National Research Foundation (NRF). I had just graduated from the University of Venda with an undergraduate degree (BSc in Microbiology & Biochemistry). It was exciting to have my first work experience in a health sciences university, working on human papillomavirus (HPV) projects with Dr Lebelo as my supervisor and Prof Selokela Gloria Selabe (an associate professor in the Department of Virology who is now the Head of Virology Department) as my assigned mentor. Here I was exposed to several laboratory platforms, techniques and research. I developed skills in using scientific equipment correctly and safely, making observations, taking measurements, and following standard operating procedures when performing laboratory assays. During my internship, in May 2015, I was able to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> WAKA HPV Africa Symposium as both the secretariat and participant at the Southern Sun OR Tambo International Airport Hotel in Johannesburg [<https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/waka-hpv-africa/history/symposium-johannesbu/>]. I also attended several workshops and scientific meetings locally hosted by SMU and nationally hosted by SAASTA, CSIR and DST-NRF.

I was highly fascinated by the nature of science and strived to excel in all assigned tasks. Fortunately, my enthusiastic work ethic was recognised by senior members within the Department of Virology, who encouraged me to apply for funding to study further for an honours degree in Medical Virology. I was successful, and through Department of Science and Innovation (DSI)-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding, I conducted my honours project: “The prevalence of human papillomavirus infections in anorectal cancers at the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital from 2005 to 2012”, supervised by Dr Lebelo. When I passed my honours research project with distinction, I was overjoyed that those little sacrifices of long nights and hectic weekends working at the laboratory finally paid off. My first attempt at submitting an abstract was to present my honours

research findings at the 3<sup>rd</sup> SMU Research Days in August 2017, where I won Third Prize for the best postgraduate student poster presentation. This made me even more determined to continue learning, and I was able to enrol for a Master of Science (MSc) degree in Medicine (Medical Virology) through my successful application for a NRF-DAAD In-Country Scholarship. My project, for which I was awarded MSc Cum Laude in 2021, was titled: “Investigation of human papillomavirus viral load and messenger ribonucleic acid expression as predictors of progression to cervical cancer in women attending the Gynaecology clinic at the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital”, supervised by Dr Lebelo and co-supervised by Mr Jonny Nare Rakgole (Lecturer and PhD candidate in the Department of Virology).

While doing my MSc, I also worked as the Programme Manager for the South African Vaccination and Immunization Centre (SAVIC) at SMU [<https://savic.ac.za/>], under

the mentorship of Prof Rosemary Joyce Burnett (former SAVIC head and full Professor in the Department of Virology). This made my MSc quite a journey, because juggling between work and studies was hectic! However, this opportunity allowed me to forge networks in the public health space while working in the medical laboratory, and opened my eyes to how the results of my laboratory-based medical science projects feed into public health interventions. I learned so much about attention to detail, research ethics, time management, organisational skills, scientific writing, and presentation skills which are some of the fundamental basics in medical research. I was exposed to many travelling opportunities where I attended conferences and scientific meetings nationally and internationally. I am now a doctoral candidate and a lecturer at SMU through the NRF-new generation of academics programme (nGAP). Overall, the following international conferences were highlights for me: (i) the 31<sup>st</sup> International Papillomavirus Conference (HPV 2017) at the Cape Town International Convention Centre Convention Square, Cape Town, South Africa in February 2017; (ii) the 8<sup>th</sup> Advanced Vaccinology Course in India (INDVAC 2019) at the Christian Medical College, Vellore, India in September 2019 and (iii) the 2<sup>nd</sup> Workshop of the Global Collaboration on Advanced Vaccinology Training, Les Pensières, Veyrier-du-Lac, France in March 2022. I am also excited to have been invited to attend the MSD HPV Africa Forum, a stand-alone symposium, in Kigali, Rwanda on 22-23 September 2022.

### What is the topic of your PhD study and what does the research aim to achieve?

**VN:** My PhD study is titled “Investigation of the cervicovaginal microbiome associated with human papillomavirus infections and cervical carcinogenesis in gynaecology clinic attendees of a Tshwane tertiary hospital between 2022 and 2023”, supervised by Dr Lebelo and co-supervised by Dr Cliff Magwira (Senior lecturer in the Department of Virology). In support of the national goals for cervical cancer elimination, this study aims to investigate changes in the cervicovaginal microbiota in association with HPV infections causing cervical carcinogenesis (i.e. high risk HPV types). Data on cervicovaginal microbiota conducive to persistent high risk HPV infection, may allow for improved identification of those at

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increased risk of development of cervical cancer. Such findings may have a profound clinical impact towards developing innovative therapeutic strategies that involve manipulation of the vaginal microbiota away from pathogenic microbes to those associated with protection and health – thus, contributing to future interventions and patient management.

### **What are your responsibilities in the department of virology and how has it been since you joined?**

**VN:** I was appointed as a SAVIC nGAP Lecturer in the Department of Virology, with 80% of my time being spent on research as stipulated by the funders of the nGAP programme. This includes working on my own PhD project, and supervising my current post-graduate students (2 MSc and 1 MMed). The remaining 20% of my time is spent on teaching and SAVIC management. My teaching responsibilities span both postgraduate teaching for the BSc (Honours) programme in the Departments of Virology and Microbiology, and undergraduate teaching for SAVIC's online Higher Certificate (Vaccinology) programme in the School of Pharmacy. For the BSc (Honours) programme, I develop and facilitate the basic vaccinology module, while for the HCert (Vaccinology) programme, I develop and facilitate Module 2 (Introduction to vaccinology) and Module 5 (Introduction to viral vaccine-preventable diseases). My SAVIC management responsibilities include overseeing vaccine industry grant proposals and managing industry funding, and supervising SAVIC's Deputy Programme Manager (Ms Nontobeko Lungile Shabangu). Furthermore, I am one of the Blackboard Champions for the Virology Department, having been certified as a Blackboard expert by the Blackboard Academy after completion of the SMU Digital Teaching and Learning course series in 2020. In addition, I facilitate the MBCHB Selective Programme in the Department of Virology.

The journey at the Department of Virology has been phenomenal, filled with many learning curves and growth. Ever since I joined the department in 2015, I have received immense support from my supervisors, especially Dr Lebelo, my mentors, Prof Selabe and Prof Burnett, the entire SAVIC team and Virology Department. So many nuggets of wisdom, tears and joy have been shared within the Department - we have literally grown into more than just colleagues, we are a family! I can say I have seen a lot of progress in my career path, and there is still potential for more growth as I continue on this journey, being pro-active, open to learning new technologies while enhancing my knowledge and skills in the fields of laboratory science and public health.

### **What is your view on mentorship, especially for upcoming academics and what do you think the university should do to address issues of mentorship?**

**VN:** I personally believe that mentorship is a necessity for every upcoming academic. My entire journey at SMU has been anchored by those who have walked the path before me. By definition, mentorship is a personal development relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. I believe this is crucial especially for upcoming academics because things can get extremely overwhelming particularly when it comes to balancing life and academia. A mentor will support you, encourage you, provide feedback, give advice, and help you define and reach your goals. As an upcoming academic, mentorship can be a key relationship in your life and one that has the potential to impact your choices and career trajectory significantly. Also, when done properly, mentorship is a win-win for both the mentee and mentor. For instance, while the purpose is to help the mentee grow professionally, sharing this

knowledge reinforces it within the mentor as well. Mentors may teach mentees skills they no longer use regularly, so this practice can help mentors rebuild or strengthen them.

With that said, several issues may arise and defeat the whole purpose of mentorship - these should be dealt with sooner to avoid frustrations. Just to mention a few, potential challenges in a mentoring relationship may include (i) having a mismatch between a mentor and mentee which may result from conflicting personalities, differing career goals or areas of scientific expertise, differences in work ethic, or any number of other reasons; (ii) the mentee becoming overly dependent on their mentor; or (iii) the mentee seen as lacking the commitment to carry out the considerable work required to develop a successful career in academia.

Fortunately, the mismatch is usually discovered early in the relationship by the mentor, the mentee, or both. The longer the mismatch continues, the more difficult it is to resolve. Otherwise, I think the university could invest in a personality compatibility programme to help match mentee and mentor early on. In addition to having mentorship training workshops to ensure both the mentor and mentee are equipped and have clear guidelines on how to maintain a healthy professional mentoring relationship, the university could also encourage team building or peer-mentorship programmes that help with knowledge reinforcement for upcoming academics, to help them understand how being mentored can help them to reach their full potential, thus promoting their personal and professional development in a supportive way.

Not many people are willing to become mentors probably because of their already existing workload or perhaps there is no recognition for their mentorship contributions. Thus to address such issues, the university could factor in protected time for mentorship and perhaps offer honoraria or recognition awards to encourage mentoring relationships within the university.

### **Besides your PhD, what are the current projects you are involved in?**

**VN:** Regarding research projects, I am involved in the ongoing COVID-19 sero-prevalence survey study at SMU/DGMAH, where I am responsible for the study data management. The project is led by Dr Andrew Musyoki (SAVIC's Deputy Head and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Microbiology) - the winner of the best independent researchers' oral presentation award at our recent SMU Research Day. Regarding vaccine advocacy and technical support, I am involved in supporting the National Department of Health's Social Listening Committee by creating public demand for COVID-19 vaccination through social listening and social media campaigns. In addition, I am part of the International Collaboration on Advanced Vaccinology Training (ICAVT), representing SAVIC's Vaccinology Short Courses and the HCert (Vaccinology) programme.

### **What are your future plans?**

**VN:** I intend to continue learning, making a difference and contributing new knowledge to medicine and public health. My short-term priority is establishing an essential diagnostic list for the identification of women at risk of cancer development globally, and ensuring that such tests should be available at point-of-care and in laboratories in all countries to increase timely and life-saving diagnoses. Ultimately, my long-term goal is in line with SAVIC's vision – to see an African continent free from vaccine-preventable diseases.



# SMU Student chosen for prestigious Abe Bailey travel bursary

After a hiatus of two years due to COVID-19, the Abe Bailey Travel Bursary will resume in 2022. With a rich history that spans 71 years, the Travel Bursary is a unique leadership development bursary only available to registered South African fulltime students and junior academic staff.

Established in terms of the last will and testament of the late Sir Abe Bailey who died in 1940, the trustees of the Abe Bailey Trust commenced with the Travel Bursary in 1951. The bursary is awarded to academically strong students, who illustrate exceptional qualities of leadership and community service.

Universities are nominated by the Abe Bailey Trust to participate. Students who meet the application criteria are asked to apply. Those that meet the application criteria go through a rigorous nomination process, including an interview, after which three students are nominated by their respective university. The Abe Bailey Trust trustees then further evaluate the applications and selects the best candidates to represent South Africa.

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University is proud to announce that Ms Nteboheng Xaba, a MBCHB 6 student in the School of Medicine, was selected to participate in the Travel Bursary. When asked why she applied, Ms Xaba commented: "I applied for this accolade for numerous reasons. Although the incredible privilege of international travel was captivating, the

opportunity to amplify my knowledge on a global scale in line with my personal vision was most appealing. It is crucial that, as a young leader, I use every opportunity as a stepping-stone for personal growth. It is imperative that we set a positive example and lay a strong foundation for other eager young leaders."

The objective of the Travel Bursary is indeed to broaden the views of young South Africans by enabling outstanding students who show exceptional leadership qualities to effect greater understanding and co-operation among individuals from different backgrounds; to promote South African unity; and to enable young, promising South Africans to visit, understand and appreciate British history, culture and institutions. Ms Xaba will join 18 other bursars from public universities around South Africa and travel to Cape Town, England and Scotland for three weeks from 22 November 2022 - 18 December 2022.

When asked what she is looking forward to the most, Ms Xaba said: "According to our itinerary, we will have a 'work shadow day'. I am extremely excited about the work experience day, because I will be visiting a hospital from a completely new country with specialist doctors who face and overcome different challenges on a daily basis. This will be a new experience for me, because I will have the opportunity to learn from various specialist doctors, I am certain that the knowledge and skills that I will acquire will shape me into an exceptional doctor."



# Let us nurture a Culture of Giving at SMU



Have you ever wondered why some Universities always appear to have "extra" funds to support needy students by offering bursaries/ scholarships, and to support initiatives such as providing meals to needy students?

Many times, these are older well-established institutions where the culture of giving has been ingrained in the psyche of staff, alumni and members of the convocation of these institutions.

We, at SMU, have now taken a conscious decision to primarily sensitize our staff, students, alumni and convocation that they must be the first port of call when it comes to fund raising efforts for our needy students. Our view is simple: that unless we ourselves become champions of giving, nobody else will believe in our calls to fund raise. If we don't believe in the cause ourselves, why should anybody else? It is for this reason that we, recently, launched the SMU Harambee Annual Fund which has been well received by our staff, students and alumni.

The spirit of Ubuntu and giving is part of our DNA. It is a long known African tradition that a child belongs to the community and hence the adage:

**"It Takes a Village to Raise a Child".**

Our students are our children; and SMU is their community which is expected to contribute towards their growth and development. To our SMU staff, students, alumni and convocation, I passionately call on your virtue and sense of community and belonging! Let us nurture a spirit and culture of giving by providing a safety net for our vulnerable students by giving them a sense of pride and dignity. I urge you to support the SMU Harambee initiative!

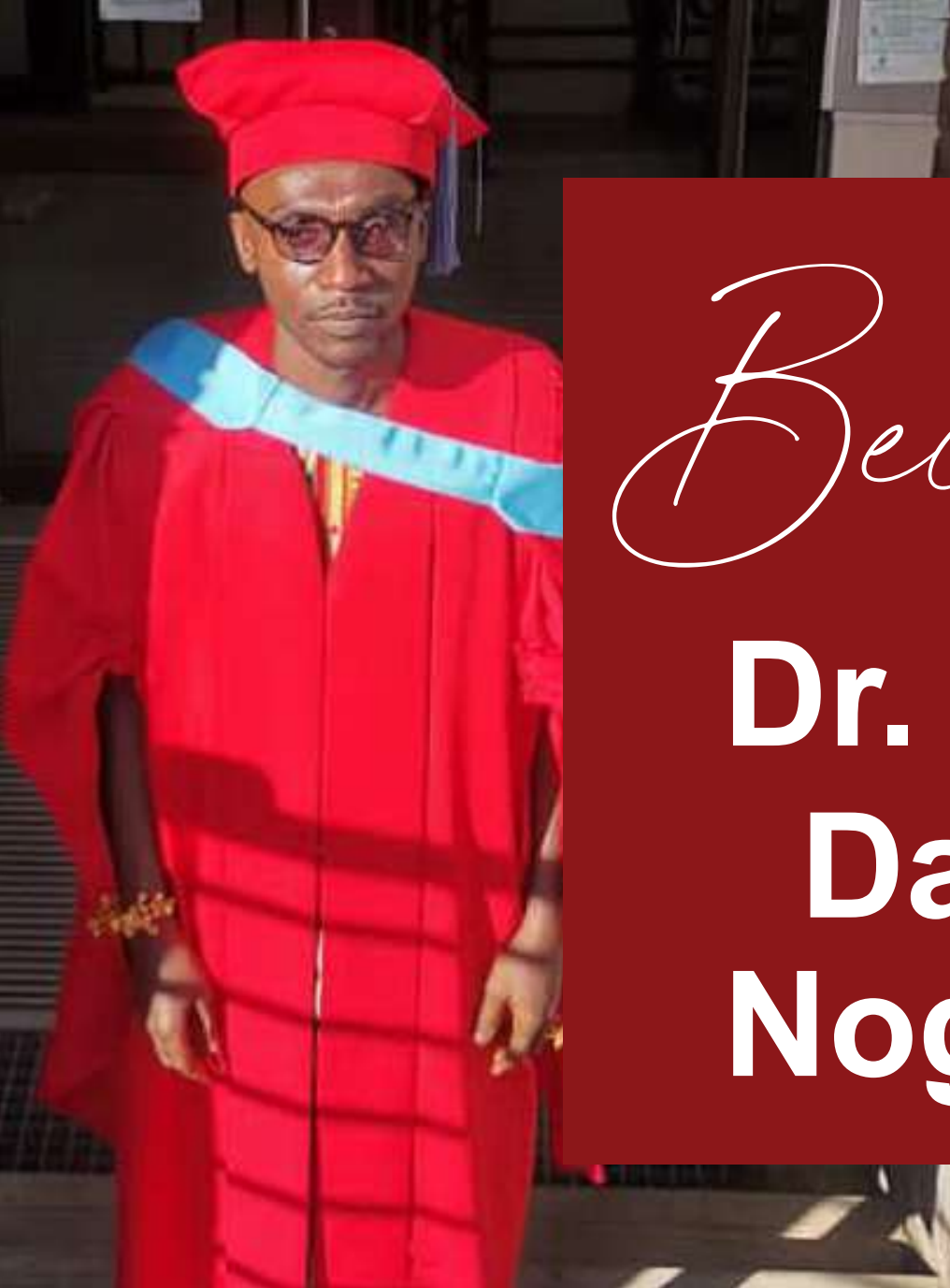


## WAYS TO GIVE

1. Payroll donations
2. Online donations:  
<https://smu.devman.co.za/devman/online/giving/>
3. Pay Scan – Zapper
4. SMU Banking Details  
Ref: Standard bank | Acc: 070754128  
Branch Code: 020909  
Q013 - Name Surname

## CONTACT DETAILS

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**Cell:** 073 069 0428



*Becoming*

# Dr. Noel David Nogbou

**B**orn and bred in Ivory Coast where he also started his schooling until his honours degree Dr. Noel David Nogbou stayed with his family until deciding to move to South Africa to fulfil his dream of becoming a medical scientist.

## **1. Why did you decide to study with Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University?**

Before choosing I had to look at a country that was not too far from my country's medical issues because I needed to be relevant. I then realized that if I go to France I'll be studying diseases that may not be applicable to my country and Africa as a whole. Then I had to look at which African country will offer this degree in English and will be relevant to my country's medical issues, which is how I decided on South Africa. In coming to South Africa I applied to The University of Pretoria, The University of Free State and Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. I got chosen in all the

schools but I chose SMU because it was solely a medical school.

## **2. How was your admission process?**

When I came to Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University I registered for an honours degree again. But the department did not understand why I was registering for a degree that I already had. For me doing that degree again in English was to help me understand the language better and I subsequently did 2018 I did my masters in 2018 and completed the PhD in 2021.

## **3. What challenges were you faced with in your journey?**

Coming from a French speaking background and having done all my schooling prior in French it was very difficult to adjust into the environment and with the course in itself. In the first three months I failed a module that no one fails even though I took an English course for a year did not help

*continues to page 15...*

much because I realized spoken English is very different from academic English. But since my dream was to become a medical scientist having studied in English I had to make it, so I worked very hard.

I had difficulties with my assignments. I had to translate them from English to French when I was done writing then translate them back to English and it took me longer than other students to finish. But as time went, it got better. In my first semester I was at the bottom of the class, my marks were very low.

When I got to masters level, I had different challenges. Upon completion of the honours degree, my family wanted me to look for work and get married while I still wanted to continue with school. They interpreted this as running away from responsibility. This meant I had to take on the financial responsibility towards my education and that saw me moving into student residence on campus. NRF paid for my accommodation whilst I had to find ways of feeding myself.

I had to adjust to the life of campus and was not used to the noise due to partying and drinking every weekend. I lived a lonely and excluded life. This pushes you towards depressions. I often found myself alone in the lab early hours of the morning working and crying at the same time as I did not have support.

To keep my sanity I joined the university's karate team. Karate was very therapeutic and it gave me something to do other than my books and Prayer became my window of peace. What also helped me was the friendships I had built with my supervisors. Having someone to talk to about personal issues made a big difference.

In my PhD years the depression became worse. Here I was busy with my studies and my mates were getting married and working nice jobs. It had me question whether I had made the correct decision by pursuing education over what people thought was the norm which is starting a family and getting a well-paying job. It was heart breaking to have students who dress and eat better than me, who drove while I had to walk everywhere.

Once you are done with your PhD you feel empty, you feel like you have no purpose. That is the most awkward feeling I've felt.

Newly PhD graduates who are financially broke are broken souls. At this moment you reflect back at your life and you

start to question whether you have made the right decisions. You have the PhD then what? You feel like apart from the certificate there is nothing to show for your life. Unfortunately as human beings we have a tendency to compare things. You start to compare your life with that of your mates. I felt empty at this point.

#### 4. Was there any help from the university with the depression and the financial constraints you went through?

The university has done its level best where it could, but depression and the feeling of emptiness is a very personal matter. For one to receive help in that level you need to voice out your feelings and most of us do not like talking about our feelings.

In terms of finance the university is playing a huge role in trying to alleviate the financial burden of its students and that is one of the reason I stayed at SMU. The money you receive is not much but it is very much helpful. As a PhD student you get certain amount depending on your department and my department does not have much funding in financially assisting its PhD students like other departments. I must say that the university as a whole is doing a good job in trying to make sure no student goes to bed hungry.

#### 5. What are your final remarks on SMU as University?

SMU is a supportive University, it truly goes to length for their own. As far as I know SMU is the only university that strive to make education accessible even for the humble background student. There are doors you can knock on and tell them you are hungry and they will definitely do something. It may at times not be adequate enough but it goes a long way.

What I also appreciate with the university is that they give an attentive ear to their students, however, more can still be done.

#### 6. What is your family's reaction now that you have graduated with your PhD?

My father now has a different view to PhD than he did in the beginning. His regard to PhD is no longer just it being a piece of paper but he sees it as a way to having a position in social ranks of life. He recognise that it is a lifetime achievement and it gives one a voice in places that matter. It is just now that he understands and sees the value of our work as researchers and for that he was very proud that I am now **Dr Noel David Nogbou PhD**.



# SMUSSA

# amends its Constitution



**T**he Executive Committee of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University Staff Sports Association (SMUSSA) recently converged in Rustenburg to review and align its constitution with that of its mother body, the Southern African Universities Staff Sports Association (SAUSSA). The SMUSSA constitution is drawn to administer and regulate integrated staff sports and recreational participation and activities to improve health, wellness, and social cohesion by engendering high productivity amongst staff towards community engagement.

The SMUSSA constitution upholds human rights through a set of rules and values that guide the actions of its members. It explains how SMUSSA must be organised, operate and allocate the roles and responsibilities. "We reviewed our constitution to align it with the SAUSSA (mother body). To keep our constitution relevant to our sporting situation. The review will assist SMUSSA officials in executing their different tasks and have clear roles of office bearers," said Mr Jeff Mashiane, SMUSSA Chairperson.

In its deliberations, the SMUSSA Executive Committee was joined by representatives from SMU departments of Sports, Residences, and Advocacy & Diversity who made significant contributions during the review process facilitated by Mr

Themba Khumalo, Deputy Director of Student Life. SMUSSA's mission statement entails promoting sports, recreational, active and productive lifestyle for SMU employees; fostering friendly relations amongst SMU employees and other organisations; formulating rules and regulations for the smooth governance and management of staff sports business; engaging in community service and social transformation through sports; to promote Brand SMU through various campaigns and Inter-University sports programmes across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region; and contribute towards sports transformational at local, regional, provincial and national level in line with National Sports Agenda.

Under his leadership, Mr Mashiane wishes to see SMUSSA fulfilling its vision of having a staff sports association that advances an active and healthy lifestyle, for optimal productivity and social cohesion amongst SMU Staff members. "I wish to see positive sport spirit growth among officials and players. I wish to see healthy lifestyle practices for all. Winning trophies and medals would be a bonus and see more staff members joining staff sports. Help staff members to develop themselves in sports as coaches and officiating officials e.g. referees. See SMUSSA joining the USSA staff members".



# Physiotherapy Students play a vital role during Comrades Marathon



**F**inal Year SMU Physiotherapy Students played a vital medical role during the annual Comrades Marathon on Sunday, 28 August 2022. The international sporting event attracted over 15 000 athletes from all over the world to undertake the 90 km down run from Pietermaritzburg to Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Globally, it is the biggest ultra-marathon that requires athletes to condition their bodies and a consultation with a physiotherapist is essential. The medical treatment that athletes received from physiotherapy students before, during and postrace included amongst other things; muscle relaxation, spasms release, strapping, gait analysis for correction, screening of injuries, biomechanical screen for injury prevention, and sports education on proper running gear to use inclusive of foot arch support.



Speaking at the Comrades Marathon Ms Karabo Raphokwane, a physiotherapy lecturer from SMU said "As a lecturer, it is amazing to witness the level of clinical training that has prepared our students to perform in such a high stake environment. It is even gratifying when the students excel in the world of sports physio as the once starry-eyed matriculants that I first met have now become professionals who can handle emergencies and restore function to an athlete after running 90km. We have participated in twelve races with the students before, the feeling is gratifying and never changes".

Comrades Marathon prepares students to perform their duties at the highest level and gives them the best training experience. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I would encourage every 4th-year student to experience. Yes, you can always go to Comrades while working but the experience of going with your classmates is different.

Also, the rush and the pressure of an international sporting event was something different from the hospital rush. Seeing first-hand what 90km can do to your body, how athletes went from walking to being carried out because suddenly their temperature dropped was scary but as health practitioners would say, interesting. An



experience I would not exchange for anything," said Mmabatho Kganane, the Class Representative.

The marathon seems to be playing a vital role in swaying the SMU graduates in choosing to specialise in sports, instead of other specialities. "When you have managed an athlete at that stage of Physiotherapy, it is only natural to fall in love with Sports Physiotherapy. Most importantly it injects the confidence to deal with sports patients, as you may know, Comrades Marathon athletes run anything from 5 hours to 12 hours to complete the 90km race. This obviously will give any physio the confidence to deal with any kind of athlete, be it soccer, rugby or any kind as you have had the expertise to deal with the most excruciating sports injuries. Comrades Marathon is any physio's gem to experience and work in. We are only happy that our university supports this vision to enhance our clinical education to such high stakes," shared Ms Raphokwane.

Physiotherapy Class of 2020 members, Bheki Khoza and Delton Khosa jointly issued a statement saying, "We lost an opportunity due to Covid-19 regulations to come do clinical work at Comrades Marathon. We knew SMU Physio students will be here so we decided to come, what we didn't anticipate is how much clinical knowledge and experience that you gain within 12 hours. Comrades teaches you anything from being a first aider, a physio, a caregiver and a supporter at the same time".

"Comrades Marathon won't be Comrades Marathon without physiotherapists because it is a difficult race. If you remove Physiotherapists from the marathon, most athletes won't finish the race. We need the physiotherapists before, during and after the race. They play a crucial role," said Amos Tshukudu, who runs for the South African Police Services' Human Resource Development Athletic Club.

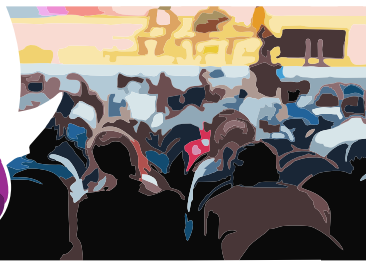
South African athlete Tete Morena Dijana won the men's race of the 2022 Comrades Marathon reaching the finish line in 5 hours 30 minutes 38 seconds while Russian runner Alexandra Morozova took the first place in the women's race finishing just over 6 hours 17 minutes 49 seconds.





# Upcoming

# EVENTS



## Symbolic Graduation Ceremonies

### For 2020 and 2021 Graduades

*Morning Session*

Date: Tuesday, 20 September 2022

Time: 10:00

Venue: SMU Sports Complex

*1st timers (Different Schools)*

*School of Science and Technology*

*Afternoon Session*

Date: Tuesday, 20 September 2022

Time: 15:00

Venue: SMU Sports Complex

*School of Health Care Sciences*

*School of Oral Health Sciences*

*Morning Session*

Date: Wednesday, 21 September 2022

Time: 10:00

Venue: SMU Sports Complex

*School of Pharmacy*

*School of Medicine*

KNOWLEDGE FOR QUALITY HEALTH SERVICES

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

@SMU\_SA

smu\_sa

SMU TV

[www.smu.ac.za](http://www.smu.ac.za)

## 23 Sep 2022

09h00 | Student Cafeteria

## SMU CELEBRATES HERITAGE DAY

### Activities of the day

Cultural Dance | Cultural Music and poetry

Cultural stalls with cultural food display and tasting

**Dress code:** *Strictly Cultural Attire*

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS COMPETITION OF**

Best cultural representation (*overall*) | Best dress female and male (*cultural*)



**GUEST SPEAKER**

Dr Lwazi Lushaba

(University of Cape Town)

**For more information contact:**

Eunice Modiba @ 5834 /

[eunice.modiba@smu.ac.za](mailto:eunice.modiba@smu.ac.za)



## VICE-CHANCELLOR'S 2022 ANNUAL FUNDRAISING GOLF DAY

"All proceeds to benefit needy students"

# 17 NOV 2022

**Time** Tee-off: Shotgun start @ 09h00 | **Registration:** 08h00

**Format:** 4 Ball Alliance

**Entry fee:** R7 500 per four-ball (*includes green fees, golf carts, t-shirts and prize-giving gala dinner*)

**Sponsorships:** Banners around a Green or tee @ R3000 - **SOLD OUT**

Watering hole no10 @ R15 000 - **SOLD OUT** | Watering hole @ R5000

**Venue** The Country Club Johannesburg | Woodmead

Booking will only be secured once payment has been received. Please pay as soon as possible by no later than Friday, 28 October 2022.

**RSVP by 28 October 2022**

**E-mail:** [babalwa.luphondo@smu.ac.za](mailto:babalwa.luphondo@smu.ac.za)

# SMU Harambee Annual Fund Challenge

*In the Spirit of Harambee, Ubuntu and Oneness,  
we pledge to pull together to raise a minimum  
of One Million Rands for SMU's needy students.*



## WAYS TO GIVE

1. Payroll donations
2. Online donations:  
<https://smu.devman.co.za/devman/online/qiving/>
3. Pay Scan – Zapper
4. SMU banking details:  
Ref - Standard bank  
Acc - 070754128  
Branch code - 020909  
Q013 - Name Surname



## OUR MISSION

SMU is to deliver a high level cadre of health care professionals trained by experts from the Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, Oral Health Sciences, Health Care Sciences and, Science and Technology.

We have a large number of brilliant students but lack sufficient resourcing to finance their various needs to fully experience a dignified university student life.

It is against this background that SMU has initiated the **SMU HARAMBEE ANNUAL FUND CHALLENGE** to raise funds to support our needy students.

## THE NEED

Join our Vice Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbatia and SMU in raising funds for a bursary program designed to assist academically qualified but financially disadvantaged students. Additionally, the initiative intends to donate to the university's Hands of Compassion food security project, which delivers meals to underprivileged students on campus.

## THE CHALLENGE

Prof. Mbatia encourages students, staff, academics and alumni to participate in a structured giving program. We are called to make a minimum monthly contribution of R10 for students, R100 for staff, and R200 for alumni. In response, Prof has given a lead donation of R10,000 and invites SMU executives to donate as well.

