

## SMU Academics and Researchers Awarded NRF Ratings





# Seven SMU Academics and Researchers awarded ratings by the National Research Foundation

**S**efako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) is proud of its seven (7) academics and researchers who have recently been awarded ratings by the National Research Foundation (NRF). The seven are Professor Kebogile Mokwena, Prof H Kluyts, Prof, Mapaseka Seheri, Prof Lawrence Obi, Dr Samantha Govender, Dr M Mkolo and Dr Gauta Matlou. The NRF rating system is a key driver in the NRF's aim to build a globally competitive science system in South Africa. It is a valuable tool for benchmarking the quality of our researchers against the best in the world. NRF ratings are allocated based on a researcher's recent research outputs and impact as perceived by international peer reviewers. The rating system encourages researchers to publish high quality outputs in high impact journals/outlets. Rated researchers as supervisors will impart cutting-edge skills to the next generation of researchers.

The Research and Innovation Directorate through the leadership of Prof Mapaseka Seheri provides support to academic researchers throughout the application process which includes but not limited to: Information sessions, step-by-step guide on how to complete the Rating application form and one-on-one meetings with potential applicants.

The rating of individuals is based primarily on the quality and impact of their research outputs over the past eight years, taking into consideration the evaluation made by local and international peers. It identifies researchers who count among the leaders in their fields of expertise and gives recognition to those who constantly produce

high quality research outputs. "Several South African universities use the outcomes of the NRF evaluation and rating process to position themselves as research-intensive institutions, while others provide incentives for their staff members to acquire and maintain a rating and give special recognition to top-rated researchers so is SMU", says SMU Director of Research and Innovation Professor Mapaseka Seheri.

#### The ratings that are awarded fall within the following categories:

- **A** – Leading international researchers
- **B** – Internationally acclaimed researchers
- **C** – Established researchers
- **P** – Prestigious Awards
- **Y** – Promising young researcher

While it is also important to note that NRF provides incentive funding to researchers once they receive their rating, SMU also does provide incentives and acknowledge rated researchers during the Annual Vice Chancellor's Excellence awards.

Detailed information on NRF Rating can be obtained at: <https://www.nrf.ac.za/rating/>

For institutional support, guidance and information please visit the Research and Innovation Directorate at 5th Floor Clinical Pathology Building or contact Prof LM Seheri ([mapaseka.seheri@smu.ac.za](mailto:mapaseka.seheri@smu.ac.za))

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# Prof Mapaseka Seheri holds a C1 NRF Rating (Re-rating)

**P**rof Mapaseka Seheri has been with SMU for sixteen (16) years serving in the Department of Virology and Research and Innovation Directorate and believes that this has provided her with a broad knowledge in research excellence and impact, teaching and learning, as well as the ability to successfully lead research enterprise and academic groups. “My current role as the Research and Innovation Director is to actively support the DVC Academic and Research in achieving the University Research and Innovation strategic objectives and to accelerate the following; 1) promote strategic collaborations and partnerships; 2) promote interdisciplinary research and attract external research funding; 3) improve and enhance high quality research output with high impact; 4) promote and strengthen existing and emerging research focus areas; 5) attract postgraduate students and postdoctoral research fellows; 6) increase research capacity, attract and strengthen research teams. I am also the Director of the Diarrhoeal Pathogens Research Unit(DPRU)/WHO Rotavirus Regional Reference Laboratory (WHO RRL)/WHO collaboration Centre.

Prof Seheri's research focus area addresses childhood diarrhoeal diseases nationally and regionally, prioritising the health of women and children in order to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), that would reduce maternal, neonatal and under-five mortality by 50% in the African Region. Diarrhoeal disease and pneumonia remain the leading causes of death in children < 5 years of age in sub-Saharan Africa.

She is a recognised scholar, leader and has extensive experience in molecular virology, disease surveillance systems, molecular epidemiology, interaction between host and virus, viral diversity, genetics and evolution, whole genome sequencing and bioinformatics for rotavirus and norovirus as well as other diarrhoeal pathogens, gut microbiome and metagenomics research, with Google Scholar Citations: 1690, h-index (Google scholar): 24 and Scopus h Index :21. Prof Seheri continued to publish at an international level of excellence in high quality journals and has more than 60 peer - reviewed articles to her name. She was awarded C1 NRF rating and has presented more than 100 papers at scientific conferences both locally and internationally. The research conducted supports the African Rotavirus Surveillance Network, Global Rotavirus Surveillance Network, Global Paediatric

Diarrhoeal Surveillance and Global Paediatric Norovirus Surveillance Network.

Prof Seheri has trained, mentored and supervised 35 postgraduate students (PhD, MSc and Hons) and 4 Postdoctoral research fellows, who have successfully completed their studies. In addition, she currently has, 2 PhD, 5 MSc and 2 Hons students registered under her supervision. “I have also served as manuscript reviewer and external examiner for postgraduate students' dissertations/thesis for various institutions locally and internationally such as; Technical University of Kenya, University of Venda, University of Pretoria, University of KwaZulu-Natal and University of North West, Mafikeng Campus. “As a collaborative effort jointly with WHO and partners, we successfully organised fourteen AFR RSN Inter-Country Training Workshops, and I have trained 42 scientists/ technologists from 29 African countries. I have earned local and international recognition in the field of diarrhoeal diseases and rotavirus, where I have made valuable contribution in the introduction of rotavirus vaccine in the African continent and my proven ability to successfully leading research and academic groups, by hosting the Rotavirus Regional Reference Laboratory - South Africa (RRL - SA), member of the African Rotavirus Surveillance Network and recently leading the Diarrhoeal Diseases and Vaccine Research WHO Collaborating Centre”, she said.

Her current network research collaborations span National, Regional, International Research Institutions, Academic Institutions and Ministries of Health of more than 27 African countries supported by research articles produced. “I am currently serving at the highest level local, national, regional and international structures and received a research fellowship with the University of Ghent, Belgium and a visiting research fellow at Centres for Disease Control and Prevention/National Centre for immunisation and Respiratory Diseases (Atlanta)”, added Prof Seheri.

She was appointed for the 2nd term by the Minister of Health to the National Authority for Containment committee on poliovirus eradication (2021-2025) and a member of various committees at SMU.

# Prof Larry Obi is a C1 NRF rated researcher and a member of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) - (Re-rating)

Prof Larry Obi holds a terminal PhD degree in Medical Microbiology, obtained at the College of Medicine, University of Lagos, Nigeria. He has taught in different Universities in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa and served as visiting Professor to the Medical School, Makerere University, Uganda; Medical School, University of Malawi, Malawi and Medical School, Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan.

Throughout his career, he served at all levels of academia: Head of Department of Microbiology in two Nigerian Universities; founding Head of Department of Microbiology, University of Venda; Deputy Dean, School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and later Acting Executive Dean, Faculty of Natural, Environmental and Integrated Studies, University of Venda; Director, School of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of South Africa. He also served as Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs and Research in two South African Universities, Walter Sisulu University and the University of Fort Hare. He, at various times, acted as Vice Chancellor in both Universities.

Prof Obi has supervised several postgraduate students, presented scientific papers at local and international conferences and published

extensively in numerous journals with more than 100 publications to his name. He served on the board of the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) and the Board of the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS). He is a member of the Specialist Committee of the National Research Foundation Rating Panel for Health Sciences, Specialist Committee for the FLAIR International Post-doctoral Fellowship Programme under the aegis of the African Academy of Sciences, Kenya and the Royal Society, United Kingdom. He is also a member of the Membership Advisory Committee (MAC), Health Sciences, Life Sciences and Agricultural Sciences of the Academy of Science of South Africa.

His academic pedigree is further exemplified by being the Principal and Country Investigator of a project on Family Planning in the context of HIV/AIDS, Principal Investigator of the Socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AuSAID), World Health Organization (WHO) Expert Committee Member on *Campylobacters* and *Campylobacteriosis*, among others. Principal Researcher. Pathogenic and Molecular profiles of *Aeromonas*, Funded by the National Research Foundation, 2008-2011.

## He also worked on numerous projects such as the following:

- Principal Researcher: Key Medico-epidemiological issues in tackling the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Collaborative Project with Tohoku University, Japan, Funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa and the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science. 2009.
- Principal Researcher: Microbiology of Cosmetic and Medicinal Clays. Funded by Walter Sisulu University, 2009.
- Principal Researcher: Antibacterial activities of medicinal plants against selected pathogenic bacteria. Funded by Walter Sisulu University, 2009.
- Co-Principal Researcher: The possible role of Osteopontin and South African Medicinal plants in the management of HIV/AIDS ARV naïve patients and those on HAART. Collaborative Project with Tohoku University, Japan. Funded by the National Research Foundation, South Africa. 2010.
- Principal Researcher: Bactericidal Activities of Honey and propolis against enter pathogenic bacteria isolated from food and water samples in Limpopo and Eastern Cape Provinces. Funded by Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, South Africa, 2010.
- Principal Researcher: Molecular landscape, antibiograms and antibacterial activities of selected medicinal plants against some enteric pathogens. Funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) of South Africa, 2010.
- Principal Researcher: National Lotteries Research Grant Award, 2011.
- Principal Researcher: National Research Foundation Research Grant Award on Community Engagement, 2011.
- Principal Researcher: National Research Foundation (NRF) Grant on a Collaborative Project between South Africa and Namibia, 2012-2014.
- Principal Researcher: National Research Foundation (NRF) Grant on Incentives for Rated Researchers 2012-2016.
- Principal Researcher: Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers research Grant, 2015-2017.
- Principal Researcher: Indigenous Knowledge Research Grant, National Research Foundation, 2016-2018.





# Prof Kebogile Mokwena - C2 rating (MSc, EdD)

**P**rof Mokwena is the first and only NRF Research Chair at SMU, and her research portfolio has shone brighter in the past few years. She obtained the MSc (Physiotherapy) from MEDUNSA and later received a scholarship for doctoral studies in the USA, where she obtained the Doctor of Education (Health Education

Administration) degree from the University of South Carolina in Columbia. She came back home and was appointed the founding HOD of the Department of Social and Behavioural Health Sciences within the then National School of Public Health.

Her interest in mental health was triggered by an MPH student she supervised, who was screening for postnatal depression in Tshwane. She later developed a proposal in that area and was later awarded a grant by the South African Medical Research Council which she used to expand her research in postnatal depression in various provinces. Towards the end of 2009, nyaope (a concoction of various substances) use was getting the interest of media publications, which caught her attention as well as her interest as a social and behavioural scientist. She was given a small seed grant by the University, which she used to conduct the initial qualitative studies among nyaope users in Ga-Rankuwa, Soshanguve, Nkangala and Mabopane.

As her work was established and her publications in this area increased, she was awarded a 3 year grant for adolescent mental health and substance abuse, which was extended to 6 years, by the South African Medical Research Council. At this time, the two research areas of substance abuse and mental health were coming together as a niche area, which prompted her to put together an NRF Research Chair proposal on substance abuse and population mental health, which was awarded in 2018, thus becoming the first NRF Research Chair at SMU.

In 2022 the 5-year prestigious grant was renewed for a further 5 years (2023 to 2027). Prof Mokwena continues to provide research leadership at SMU, as evidenced by collaboration with other researchers and supervision of students within and outside of Public Health. Her collaborations include researchers at UJ, UCT, WSU, UFS and the SAMRC.

In 2022 she co-ordinated a special edition of a journal, and provided leadership in encouraging academics to write and submit publications. "My advice to postgrad students is that they should have a publication in mind even as they develop a proposal. My current doctoral students conduct studies in various focus areas of mental health, including bullying in schools, parental stress of people who are raising children with disabilities, childhood trauma and burden of care of family caregivers of mental health care users", said Prof Mokwena.

Her current major research projects include several clinical studies on the health impact of nyaope, undiagnosed depression and anxiety among groups of people, and a national study to screen for postnatal depression among clinic attendees. She has built a strong research team which she credits with being integral to her research success.

She received 3 research excellence awards from SMU at the end of the 2022 academic year and has now added a C2 rating by the NRF to her recent achievements. 🏆



# Prof Hyla Kluyts is passionate about Anaesthesiology (C1 Rating)

**P**rofessor Hyla Kluyts is the Head of Department of Anaesthesiology and Critical Care at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University and directs anaesthesia services at the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital. She is an anaesthesiologist with a passion for understanding and addressing the barriers to accessing safe quality affordable perioperative care in the South African and African context.

Her research interest therefore aligns with the broader agenda of Global Surgery research and its implementation in education, clinical perioperative care, and surgical systems strengthening. Having spent 7 years in a private anaesthesia partnership practice, then returning to the academic sector, she has a fair grasp of the challenges faced in both the private and public healthcare sectors.

International collaboration and engagement have broadened her view of the local situation in the context of global health-care. She completed her doctoral degree in Anaesthesiology at the University of Pretoria on the topic of clinical risk prediction in surgical patients. She is the founder and executive director of a non-profit company and PBO, Safe Surgery SA (SSSA), that promotes the clinical use of perioperative healthcare data and offers research support to the African Perioperative Research Group (APORG). She is a member of the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists Safety & Quality of Practice committee and an honorary life member of the SA Society of Anaesthesiologists.

She is a consultant to the Clinical Services Unit of CareCon-nectHIE, the first non-profit Health Information Exchange in South Africa.

She is married with two daughters. 



# Dr Samantha Govender - NRF Rating: Y2

**D**r Samantha Govender is an Audiologist by profession with over 20 years of experience. She holds the following qualifications: P.hD (Telehealth/Public health) (UKZN), M. Communication Pathology (Audiology) (UKZN), B. Communication Pathology (Audiology) (UKZN). She has been part of Higher Education for the past 16 years and is a senior academic at SMU and currently serves as the Acting Head of the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Department. She completed her PhD in 2018 in the area of telehealth.

Dr Govender is expanding her research in the area of digital healthcare. Her area of focus is on digital healthcare, digital healthcare curricular development, the establishment of a digital healthcare centre at SMU and the contribution of the local community and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to the digital healthcare policies and procedures.

She is currently a fellow of the Future Professors Program (FPP) which is a program initiated by the South African Department of Higher Education in order to grow and advance the professoriate and feels privileged to have met the criteria to participate in this prestigious program.

“To date, I have published 14 peer reviewed publications in DHET accredited journals (both local and international) and have one book chapter. I have presented at several local and international conferences. Through the FPP program, I will be conducting an international engagement visit in Sept 2023 to three Universities, namely: The University of Cork (Ireland), the University of Southampton (London) and Manchester University (London) where I will be networking with the aim of identifying strategic partnerships and exploring joint funding opportunities. I am currently the chair of the SCHCS Postgraduate committee, a member of the PGC and REPC and a member of the senate community engagement committee”, explains Dr Govender.

Her current research project focuses on the establishment of a digital healthcare ecosystem within the School of Healthcare Sciences at SMU. According to Dr Govender, the ecosystem comprises of three components: A digital healthcare curriculum, a Digital healthcare training centre and an active community engagement component aligning to the digital healthcare project.

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“The aim will be to create, construct and integrate a digital healthcare curriculum that would prepare SMU healthcare professionals to work in a digitally advancing healthcare sector, to provide the necessary infrastructure to allow student learning and clinical training opportunities within the digital healthcare space and to actively engage with communities to ensure integration, involvement and acceptance by communities to digital healthcare services”, expounds Dr Govender.

Furthermore, the project involves the multidisciplinary collaboration of six departments within the SCHCS and potentially the involvement of an international collaborator. Other smaller projects involve the use of synchronous audiological testing using a mobile van to deliver hearing evaluation to newborns in Winterveld and monitoring of hearing function in neonates with Jaundice. “These projects are being spear-headed by my postgraduate students. I am also currently an editor of a book being written by the FPP cohort into the development of Academics toward the professoriate”, concluded Prof Govender.

She is married and a mother to two beautiful boys aged 12 and 5 and is also a faithful member of Hillsong church and loves cooking and traveling.

# Dr Matlou Gauta Gold (NRF-Y2 rating)

**D**r Matlou completed his Bachelor of science and honours studies with the University of Limpopo (Medunsa campus). He holds a Master of Science degree in nanoscience from University of Johannesburg and a doctoral degree in chemistry from Rhodes University. He does research in advanced drug delivery systems using metallic nanoparticles as drug carriers and photoactive dyes such as phthalocyanines as target drugs for photodynamic therapy of cancer. He has published in internationally scientific indexed peer reviewed journals amounting to 13 articles to date, with over 120 citations with H-Index of 7 on Google scholar, Scopus and Research Gate.

Dr Matlou has given oral talks at various international conferences and was a visiting student researcher at the Shinshu University, Ueda, Japan in 2016. His many accolades include being listed as one of the 2021 Top 200 Young South Africans, Mail and Guardian, under the Science and Technology category and attending the 2022 71<sup>st</sup> Lindau Nobel Laureate meeting, Lindau, Germany. Dr Matlou aspires to be a leading scientist/researcher within his specific subject in a near future. His skill set, determination, laser-focus and innovativeness are what sets him apart from the rest.

He recently joined the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University within the school of pharmacy (pharmaceutical sciences department) as a postdoctoral research fellow focusing on development of target drugs conjugated to nanoparticles for effective delivery and efficacy on diseased site. NRF-Y rating is awarded to early career scientists/researchers who held the doctorate for less than five years at the time of application, and who are recognized as having the potential to establish themselves as researchers within a five-year period after evaluation, based on their performance and productivity as researchers. 🔍



# Dr Nqobile Mkolo

## (NRF-Y2 rating)

**D**r. Mkolo N.M obtained her Ph.D. in Para-clinical Sciences from University of Pretoria, in 2019 (awarded in 2020), Master's in biology from University of Limpopo, Honours in Zoology from University of Witwatersrand and BSc. Degree from University of Free State. She is currently affiliated to SMU and serves as a Lecturer and Researcher with more than 10 years of experience teaching courses in both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Dr Mkolo's current research focus is based on Phytomedicine while much of her research work include metabolomics, proteomics, molecular-docking, and cytotoxicity assays. She has collaborated




and worked in diverse Phytomedicine related fields in multiple settings such as; University of Pretoria (Paraclinical Sciences), Taconic Bioscience USA and Denmark, Biomedical Research Centre (UPBRC), Bayworld, Centre for Proteomic and Genomic Research, University of South Africa, Agricultural Research Council, North West University, Biofuels Business incubator, South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), Wageningen University & research, Netherlands and Tadulako University (UNTAD), Indonesia, Environmental Systems Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa and Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda and Creative proteomics USA.

She continues to enhance her niche area with a record of previously supervising 5 MSc students and 22 honours students to completion of their degrees. At the moment, Dr Mkolo is supervising and mentoring a post-Doctoral researcher, 5 MSc students and 2 PhD students as well as co-supervising 6 MSc students at the Department of Biology.

She is proud to have presented scientific papers at local and international conferences and published in different journals locally and internationally. "I was nominated to represent the School of Science and Technology on the University Task Team on Internationalization, sequel to the renewed dispensation to foreground Internationalization on all fronts at SMU. Recently, I was awarded with NRF Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP) funding, South African Medical Research Council's (SAMRC) research capacity development initiative research funding, SAMRC RCID - nested Post Doc. funding and SAMRC-RCID-nested PHD scholarship research funding. I was also awarded with Academic honorary colours by University of Pretoria and also received the Vice Chancellor's Award for Best Researcher under 40 years of age provided by SMU", said Dr Mkolo.

Her academic pedigree is further illustrated by being the Principal Investigator of a project on Integration of metabolomic fingerprinting and molecular docking analysis of secondary metabolites of South African plants: Focus on protease (Mpro) and spike (S) glycoprotein of SARS-CoV-2, funded by SAMRC. "Moreover, my bigger picture about my chosen field, prompted me to collaborate with Medical Illustration and Audio-Visual Services (MIAAVS), SMU and film a documentary (2022-2024) about the journey of performing a comprehensive study of South African medicinal plants for the discovery of bioactive metabolites against SARS-CoV-2", explains Mkolo.

She is also currently working and collaborating with DS-I Africa Consortia (Research Hub (MUDSReH) DS-I Consortium, Uganda and Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute, Rhodes University, Tadulako University and ESRI (Geographic information system company) and serves as a guest editor of Visualized Experiments (JOVE).

# Ms Yandisa Lengoasa - Director Built Environment at SMU wants to built a highly productive division

Born in Mount Fletcher, Eastern Cape and being the first child of eight kids, Yandisa Lengoasa has always been ambitious, driven with a big sense of responsibility. She views it as a privilege that she pursued engineering, which was then thought to be outside the typical career trajectory for women. With a civil engineering qualification, she started her career working in the construction sector, and parastatals like Transnet, Eskom, and a consulting firm undertaking engineering design. A registered professional project manager, she has worked for UNISA and CSIR, where she oversaw projects and managed properties. Prior to joining SMU, she worked at SARS as an Executive responsible for infrastructure management.

**She speaks to us about her childhood, career journey and her new role as Director Built Environment at SMU.**



“Growing up as a first child out of many siblings has made me an enthusiastic, energetic, goal driven, achievement-oriented person with a deep sense of responsibility, and a passion to impact lives. I have an intense passion for education because I have experienced the beneficial impact that it has had on my life. This drive is what motivated both my early career decisions and my choice to work at SMU. My early childhood dream was to be an airplane pilot because it was prestigious, but I wasn't tall enough to join the SAA Cadet program and couldn't afford to further my education privately. I must admit that I stumbled into engineering by chance after going against my mother's hopes for me to pursue a career in medicine. Since I excelled in Maths and Science, my teachers recommended pursuing engineering and I was intrigued by the challenge,” says Yandisa.

I have since forged a career path over the past 16 years that combines my intense passion for societal impact with my extensive project management, engineering, and infrastructure management knowledge.

In a world of disruptive digital business models and continual changes to ways of working, teaching, and learning, the institution faces a challenge to effectively navigate uncertainty and manage rapid change to support the academic project. I have a strong belief that the Built Environment will play a key role in SMU's transformation journey. My goal at SMU is to

create a physical environment that is conducive to staff and student well-being, productivity, and enhance academic excellence, leveraging technology, alternative innovative solutions to support overall institutional effectiveness and strategy.”

**What would you say are the key challenges that you have already identified in the space that you are in since you took up the role?**

In my space, the biggest challenge is financial constraints. We have an aging physical infrastructure with components that have not been replaced or renewed since the buildings were built. This means that the assets have reached the end of their useful life and should have been renewed to improve the life span and maximise their effectiveness. But we have not been able to keep up with that due to financial constraints, and we thus have a growing deferred maintenance backlog. The aging infrastructure causes frequent breakdowns and service failures, threatens business continuity as well as the quality of the learning and living conditions for students.

Secondly, we lack the necessary technical expertise in-house to provide maintenance and engineering services. We have a large manpower cost and headcount, but relatively few technical capabilities to do the work. As a result, we rely heavily on the quality of appointed external service providers to maintain specialized facilities and equipment such as air

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conditioning plants and high voltage electrical infrastructure, which have strict regulatory requirements for the skill sets required to maintain these facilities. We have in the past, for various reasons, appointed poor performing contractors resulting in poor quality of our facilities, and you can see the quality of the workmanship throughout the campus. We frequently do not get value for money for the services that we pay for, and it is my intention to address this as an area of immediate priority. Our focus is going to be to enhance the process for selecting competent service providers, overseeing contractor performance and the quality of work, and to ensure accountability for poor performance. To ensure that our limited financial and human resources are used efficiently, we must also instil in our employees a culture of responsibility, delivery, high performance, and good work ethics.

The major current pressing challenge is projects that are not delivered on time. As the university is going through a transformation journey, infrastructure is required to support our student growth targets. For example, we require additional residences and the bulk services to support the additional students. But we are having challenges completing these projects on time. We've made some achievements, you know, as we mature as the organisation in terms of project delivery, but we still have room for improvement on delivering quality projects. I aim to focus on improving our project management capabilities.

### **Having spoken about some of these challenges, what measure would you put in place to address them?**

I am fortunate that I am building on a foundation that my predecessors have established in the past two and a half years. I intend to secure funding for infrastructure renewal and replacement to address the huge, deferred maintenance backlog indicated in the building condition assessment. We will accelerate the implementation of our commercialisation strategy to generate third income stream from otherwise idle assets.

Considering our financial constraints, which I mentioned as one of the most major challenges, I plan to focus on effective space management and optimal utilization of current facilities. We are looking at new methods to manage space, as well as new ways to design, reconfigure and refurbish existing facilities to correspond with our evolving blended learning strategies. I want to make sure that we sweat our existing assets and leverage technology before providing extra buildings that we may be unable to operate in the future. We are collaborating with the ICT team and faculty to explore and build learning and workspace designs that are responsive to technological trends and the evolving higher education landscape. We shall then renovate the lecture halls, offices and residences using these interior architectural design standards.

I also want to focus on enhancing our responsiveness as a team to provide excellent support to the university community. We have already established a Help desk with a call logging facility that makes it easy for the university community to log calls for

any breakdowns. We've also established a service level agreement to enable us to monitor performance and areas of improvement to attend and to those quicker.

By proactively introducing a preventative maintenance program throughout our facilities, I have begun measures to increase the maturity of our maintenance department. We will be undertaking building inspections on a regular basis to shift to a proactive maintenance philosophy. My main priority is to capacitate the division to deliver. We will train current employees to build a high-performing team and culture. As we work to establish this new culture of productivity, we have implemented performance contracts with all team members.

In the short term, further improvements are required in our supply chain to appoint competent contractors and to improve the quality of workmanship. In my first month here, I commenced with a procurement process to appoint contractors that can augment the in-house skills so that they can be able to maintain, repair and replace the infrastructure. We've also implemented controls in our supply chain processes to ensure we get qualified and competent contractors in partnership with the supply chain teams. This will lead to improved quality of workmanship in our projects and maintenance services.

Finally, I am conscious of our obligation to reduce our carbon footprint and minimize the environmental impact of our daily operations. We wish to reduce our large electrical and water bill to save our scarce resources and save money. We worked together with Rand Water to launch a water-wise campaign in March to educate our SMU community about their responsibility in water conservation. We have begun repairs to the plumbing and aging piping network to address water leaks. As part of our environmental sustainability action plan, we are investigating alternate water and energy sources, such as rainwater harvesting for irrigation and electricity from renewable sources. We have engaged the CSIR to help us identify areas of improvement and to design an energy efficiency plan.

### **For water harvesting purposes, do you have the infrastructure yet to harvest rainwater or you're still looking into it as a future plan?**

For irrigation I know in the past we used to have an irrigation system across the campus where we got water from the existing dam on campus. The current bulk services upgrade project aims to resuscitate that, so we'll use that as water for irrigation.

### **On the major projects currently taking place at SMU such as the 2000 and 800 beds projects and others, Ms Lengoosa had this to say:**

"Following a bumpy start to the project, the consultants have now completed the detailed designs for the 800-bed accommodation project. The consultants will be presenting revised cost estimates for approvals so we can appoint a contractor. We anticipate having a contractor in the next four months and plan to commence with construction this year.

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The 2000 beds accommodation project is under construction and set to be completed by December 2023. However, the occupancy readiness of the project depends on the completion of the bulk water supply that will support the new 2000 bed facility. So those two projects must go hand in hand, and there is also some requirements from the City of Tshwane for a road upgrade, which is meant to then support or provide infrastructure for the new residences. Those are some of the risks with the project, but as things stands now, as per current project schedule we should be able to complete the works by December 2023. It's exciting as we've just seen some of the roofs now up in the residences”.

Lengoasa also believes that health and safety issues are critical, and this also forms part of her responsibilities. “Besides infrastructure, the health and safety function, has now moved into my portfolio since January and I take it as part of my immediate priorities. Our goal is to provide a safe and appropriate environment for both students, staff, visitors, and contractors. My aim is to work with the SMU community to entrench a culture of health and safety within the organisation. One of our projects is to install of fire protection systems, especially at the residences and the repairs of the existing systems in our five buildings. A contractor will be appointed soon for this. By end of the year we plan to have an effective health and safety management system in place.

She also regards the gardens and grounds project which is closer to the heart of the Vice-Chancellor Prof Mbatia as critical. “The major improvement we aim to make, which is the VC's Pet project which gives me sleepless nights is the maintenance of the gardens and the grounds. I understand the need to having an immaculate and well-maintained campus, because as you come through the campus, the campus is a physical representation of our brand. As you walk in through the gate, we want to create an aesthetically pleasing environment, one that demonstrates excellent work our staff and students. So we want to upgrade the main entrance, the gardens, make sure the facilities are clean and to plant new trees. We received a grant of about R16 million from the Department of Forestry and Environment and we await the appointment of the contractor to implement the landscape improvements”, she added.

**What is your vision for the department?**

My vision is to have a high productive division that is capa-

culated to deliver. I want to go back to the basics, you know, of maintenance, making sure that we have preventative maintenance in place, maintain and renew the existing facilities. I want us to be at the forefront of provision of a working, learning, and research environment that aligns with technology driven model of teaching and new ways of working. I want us to provide spaces that align with the current needs of students and academics as well as future needs being mindful of the changing ways working and teaching and learning.

I want us to deliver excellent professional services that are sustainable, that are supportive of academic excellence for now and into the future, creating a productive, safe, and well-maintained physical environment that is a representation of an excellent SMU.

My vision is to be a leading built environment and professional services team, which is widely recognised for creation and maintenance of an exceptional and innovative, cutting-edge learning environment for students.

I want to build a professional team that can be able to deliver, a team that is highly engaged and highly capable. I aim to partner both with the internal SMU community, the public and private sectors for us to achieve vision.



# Prof Hannelie Meyer

head of the South African Vaccination and Immunisation Centre recently appointed to serve on the National Advisory Group on Immunisation (NAGI) and an expert member on the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) Policy Committee.



**P**rof Hannelie Meyer from the School of Pharmacy and Head of the South African Vaccination and Immunisation Centre (SAVIC) at SMU, was recently appointed by the Minister of Health to serve on the National Advisory Group on Immunisation (NAGI). She was also selected to serve as an expert member on the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) Policy Committee, tasked to write a policy on the Role of Pharmacists in Life-Course Vaccination.

#### **How do you feel about being appointed to serve on the National Advisory Group on Immunisation?**

In 2018, I was appointed by the Minister of Health to serve on South Africa's National Immunisation Safety Expert Committee (NISEC), and was subsequently elected as Chair of NISEC. Since then I have served on NAGI in my capacity as Chair of NISEC, which, being an *ex officio* position, means that I contributed my expertise but did not have voting rights. I am thus very pleased with this appointment as this will be an opportunity for me to more meaningfully contribute towards promoting and protecting the health of all South Africans, and working towards SAVIC's vision of an African continent free of vaccine-preventable diseases.

#### **What is your role and responsibilities at NAGI?**

As a member of NAGI I will work with other experts in vaccinology and immunisation, to provide medical, scientific and public health advice to the Minister of Health, the National Department of Health (NDoH) and the Expanded Programme on Immunisation of South Africa (EPI-SA) on all issues relating to vaccination and immunisation in South Africa. Examples of NAGI advisories include recommendations pertaining to

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vaccines currently used in EPI-SA, the introduction of new vaccines, responding to outbreaks (such as the current measles outbreak) and identifying priority research needs.

### **Tell us more about your appointment to the FIP Policy Committee.**

This is an international committee, consisting of 12 members from all regions of the world, tasked to develop a “Global Policy Statement on the Role of Pharmacists in Life-course Vaccination”. Apart from serving the pharmacy community globally, it will also be a networking opportunity for me, as I will be working with a group of experts from pharmacy practice and academia, with expertise in pharmacy-based vaccination.

### **What are the immediate tasks you are going to focus on?**

As a member of this committee I will be expected to provide input based on my expertise and experience within the practice setting, and knowledge of the needs and priorities on this topic in South Africa and the wider southern African region. For clarity, life-course vaccination refers to immunisation at all stages of life - from pregnancy, to birth, to old age - to promote health throughout life, preserve functionality throughout life, promote healthy ageing and prevent death and disability. This approach also includes the development of strategies to combat inequity and improve access to immunisation for everyone, everywhere and at every age.

### **What role can pharmacists in South Africa play in life-course vaccination?**

Pharmacists are well placed within all communities, both rural and urban, to deliver primary healthcare services, including immunisation, as the first point of contact for the vast majority of South African citizens. Research has shown that the provision of vaccination services by pharmacists is cost-effective and known to increase vaccination uptake. Increased utilisation of pharmacists as primary healthcare providers will help alleviate pressure on our current healthcare system, reduce potential disruption to routine immunisation beyond infancy, and strengthen health system capacity and vaccination coverage. SAVIC and the Department of Public Health Pharmacy and Management have already taken a step in the right direction by developing a short course to train pharmacists as vaccinators to assist in improving vaccination coverage for all vaccines within EPI-SA, including COVID-19 vaccines. We are currently awaiting accreditation of the course by the South African Pharmacy Council, after which it will be submitted to SMU for accreditation.

### **What are the major concerns and challenges of immunisation within the country?**

Despite efforts of EPI-SA to increase vaccination coverage, there are still thousands of children in South Africa who do not receive a single vaccine, leaving them vulnerable to some of the world's deadliest diseases. In addition, the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to regular immunisation services, with children missing some of their routine immunisations, providing an opportunity for dangerous viruses and bacteria to circulate. South Africa's vaccination coverage rates are currently below the WHO's targets. For example, the measles vaccination coverage rate is between 75% and 80%, whilst 95% coverage is required to prevent an outbreak of measles. This is

why South Africa is currently experiencing a huge measles outbreak in 7 of the 9 provinces.

Apart from disruptions to immunisation services because of the pandemic, there are also other challenges to vaccine uptake. These include health system challenges such as limited access to vaccination services and unavailability of vaccines for some populations, and vaccine hesitancy because of concerns about the safety and efficacy of vaccines, fuelled by the spread of misinformation, poor health literacy and lack of trust in the government.

### **What is your advice to people concerning immunisation?**

The COVID-19 pandemic made us realise how quickly an infectious disease can spread in the absence of safe, effective vaccines. Immunisation is by far the most effective way to protect against life-threatening infectious vaccine-preventable diseases. People need to make sure that they have received all the vaccines that they are eligible for, AND those with children must check their vaccination records and confirm that their children have received all the scheduled vaccines. Vaccination is also about herd immunity. We all have a responsibility to protect ourselves against vaccine-preventable diseases, as well as those around us, including infants too young to be vaccinated, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems e.g. people with cancer who are not able to mount an adequate immune response after vaccination, and those who are not able to get vaccinated due to a particular medical condition.

People who are hesitant to vaccinate need to weigh the minimal risks of vaccination against the benefits of avoiding a life-threatening vaccine-preventable disease such as measles, including the risk of serious consequences such as life-long disability or death. One of the main reasons why people are hesitant is because of the spread of misinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories, especially on social media. Always verify the factual correctness of information, and do not spread any misleading information. As healthcare professionals, it is also our responsibility to make sure that people have access to the correct, scientifically-based information to help them make informed decisions. Never share social media messages without checking the validity of the contents. When receiving misinformation from colleagues, friends and family, engage with them by providing helpful suggestions on where they can find valid information.

Finally, remember, it is never too late to vaccinate! 🔍



# SMU's newest Abe Bailey Travel Bursary fellow



**Y**ou may ask why an international experience is important. It is important because, when embraced and fully immersed in it, it changes you and allows you to see and experience your own strength and character. You are allowed to grow and dream and bring back new perspectives and ideas to your home country. As Denzel Washington once said: "You never know how or when you'll have an impact, or how important your example can be to someone else."

During the 2022 December holidays, Nteboheng Xaba, a final year student in the School of Medicine, became SMU's newest Abe Bailey fellow. She was chosen to represent SMU after a rigorous application process. Upon the conclusion of the Bursary, the Internationalisation Directorate asked her a few

questions to inspire other SMU students in preparation for the new 2023 Abe Bailey Travel Bursary applications that open in mid-April:

### **In what way did you occupy your time on something money cannot buy?**

Secret Santa! 'Pick a paper strip, the name on the paper is the name of the person that you will be gifting. You should buy an inexpensive gift and write them a note saying at least three positive things. Keep it a secret.'

I took initiative by coming up with and running the idea of Secret Santa, towards the end of the tour. The Secret Santa was extremely beneficial to everyone. It was some cheerful

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Christmas spirit. Seeing everyone so happy about his or her gift and curious to find out whom they were from was an extremely heart-warming experience. I was humbled that we managed to pull it off.

**In what way has your 'pot' been filled in the Tour by something that made you think?**

I have respect for the fact that people have different views and it is okay. As long as we can put our differences aside and work towards a common goal, we can accomplish so much more including the 'impossible'. I have also been fortunate enough to learn the true meaning of 'speak less, smile more'. Through this phrase, I allowed myself to listen to other people's opinions and views.

Unfortunately, before this tour I had no interest in politics. During the tour, my 'pot' was filled with many different opinions, especially regarding British and South African politics. I would never have thought that I would ever become so interested in politics and current events. It was necessary for me to become open minded to the political world since it affects each and every one of us in one way or another.

**What inspired you during the Tour?**

Throughout life, we all become acquainted with life's altering experiences, some changing us for the better, and others for the worse. It is our job, as individuals, to either learn and develop in the face of these experiences or to dismiss them without looking back. They are what shape our very character, our foundation for the future. Without them, we'd be empty shells, individuals without any substance to guide them. This entire trip had a culmination of big and small moments that inspired me. Ultimately, this tour itself has deeply inspired me. The vastness of the trip, the phenomenal people I travelled with. I was exposed to a side of the world that I've never seen before. I am inspired to excel beyond any limits that I had set

for myself. The world is enormous, endless. There is so much more beyond South Africa. I do not have to limit myself to South Africa alone, I am inspired to further my studies and specialise further.

**What personal lessons did you learn on the Tour and how did you become a better person?**

The success of any relationship relies on the ability to communicate well. Good communication skills require a high level of self-awareness. Understanding my personal style of communicating will go a long way toward helping me to create positive and lasting impression on others. I am more aware of my verbal and non-verbal language. I also learned to resolve problems and conflicts as they arise. There were several instances where I was misunderstood. Looking back, these situations were necessary, to make me self-aware.

**How are you leaving the Tour?**

I am leaving the Tour feeling deeply grateful to have been selected to participate in such an amazing journey. I have had a humbling experience of getting to know a different side of myself and I have found myself to be compassionate and strong. I am proud of the woman that I am becoming. I persevered and managed to overcome every challenge that I faced. I am humbled by the resilience and determination within me. I am fuelled to continue to make a difference within my community and in the world at large.

*We thank Dr Nteboheng Xaba for being an exemplary SMU Ambassador. Applications for the 2023 Abe Bailey Travel Bursary will be announced on all SMU communication platforms towards the end of April.*

If you would like to receive communication regarding the Abe Bailey Travel Bursary 2023 Application, please email Dr Carlien Jooste on [carlien.jooste@smu.ac.za](mailto:carlien.jooste@smu.ac.za).





# SMU joins the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA)

**T**he International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) has been actively promoting South African higher education globally for the past 25 years. Locally, the Association advocates for international students' rights and provides a support system for International Offices.

SMU recently became a member of the Association. "As SMU's Internationalisation Agenda is now taking shape, we look forward to the benchmarking and networking opportunities provided by this membership," said Dr Carlien Jooste, Director of SMU's Internationalisation Directorate.

In 2023, IEASA celebrates 25 years of being the recognised South African mouthpiece that advocates for internationalisation in the developing and emerging world. IEASA believes that: "If South Africa is to remain competitive within the global economic environment, it is important that our higher education provides opportunities for students to obtain a global perspective to their studies."

The Internationalisation Directorate invites SMU staff interested in Internationalisation and activities that can promote Internationalisation at Home to contact Dr Jooste on: [carlien.jooste@smu.ac.za](mailto:carlien.jooste@smu.ac.za).



# IEASA

International Education  
Association of South Africa

# Runners come together to raise money for students

**A** group of runners came together and embarked on a 300 km run over a period of Seven days including the Easter weekend to raise money for both SMU and the University of Limpopo students. Led by prominent health practitioner and psychiatrist Dr Arnold Lawrence who is an SMU alumnus, the group started running from Pretoria and finished in Mankweng, Polokwane at the University of Limpopo.

Dr Lawrence explained that the group wanted to raise around R450 000 which will be handed over to the universities. “This whole idea comes from just doing fundraising runs and I noticed that everyone is focusing on primary and secondary schools while there is a need to help tertiary students. I then remembered that when I went to university many years ago, my family had to save for 2 years and we did not even eat meat for those years because they wanted me to have enough money to further my studies. It then dawned on me that

families are not aware that just registering a child can make a difference and the rest will follow. I therefore came with the idea to raise money for registration fees for students. It's a fact that there are students who are financially excluded and some cannot get their degrees from universities because they owe fees. It then emerged as well that we still have students who don't have food and so on. We want students who will then have access and be able to compete fairly”, said Dr Lawrence.

Asked how he put the runners together, Dr Lawrence said, “These are people I normally run with and they came to join me because they understand the plight of students and they want nothing out of it, it's a sacrifice they were prepared to make to help others”, he concluded.

Tshifhiwa Mulaudzi from SMU also joined the runners for the race and explained that he decided to join the runners because it was the right thing to do. “I became interested because this marathon aimed to uplift students who come from poor backgrounds, raise money for them to help with registration fees. Many have the potential to become great, however they can be disadvantaged lack of funds not to pursue their dreams. Every kilometer we ran was for a good cause, its about making a contribution and uplifting communities”, said Dr Mulaudzi.

Dr Lawrence said they will make an announcement in due course when they hand over the money to the two universities.



# 2023 OPEN DAY



11 May | 08h00 - 16h00  
SMU Sports Complex

FOR RSVP OR ENQUIRIES  
PLEASE CONTACT:

[babalwa.luphondo@smu.ac.za](mailto:babalwa.luphondo@smu.ac.za)  
or 012 521 5976  
or 063 400 2149 (WhatsApp)

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

## LEARNERS STUDYING

pure mathematics, physical science, life science,  
English and any other additional subjects.

*Grade 10,11 and 12, learners must wear full school uniform.*



# SMU Harambee Annual Fund Challenge



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.

## 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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