

From the VC's Desk

Highlights | Thought Leadership

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NEWS



SMU hosts delegation from the Embassy of the United States



On Wednesday, 05 July 2023, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbatia hosted representatives from the Embassy of the United States (US). The purpose of the meeting was two-fold. Firstly, the aim was to introduce Southern Africa's only dedicated health sciences university to the US delegation and secondly, exploring areas of engagement, infrastructure development, research, and other possible mutually beneficial opportunities.

The US delegation was led by the Health Attaché and Regional Representative of the Department of Health and Human Services, stationed at the US Embassy in Pretoria, Dr. Sophia Siddiqui. She was accompanied by Dr. Vincent Zishiri, an International Health Specialist stationed at the US Embassy. SMU was represented by among others, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Research, various Deans, the Director Internationalisation and the Director Marketing and Communications.



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SEFAKO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

Prof Mbatl opened the meeting with a brief presentation which not only focused on SMU as a whole, but also highlighted various strategic focus areas that SMU would like to explore with US-based entities. Importantly, Prof Mbatl commented that: "SMU would like to explore opportunities not only for the University in terms of partnerships and research-related activities, but also for students to participate in vocational training and internships in technology companies in the US, as well as enhance the work being done in the University's Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubation (CfERI)."

Prof Mbatl further discussed infrastructural development needs with a specific focus on SMU's Campus Health Clinic and Centre for Pandemics to be established at SMU. The discussion concluded with a focus on SMU's research activities and the various centres and units within SMU. Prof. Patrick Demana, the Dean of the School of Pharmacy, further highlighted the unique work his School is engaged in, in terms of drug development and manufacturing research.

In her response, Dr. Siddiqui, confirmed the need for collaboration between SMU and US research entities and higher education institutions, further emphasizing the fact that this should be underpinned by strong partnerships with local institutions as well. She further highlighted the commitment by her Office to introduce SMU to US institutions with regard to available training opportunities aimed at capacity development in the health sector. One of these programmes, specifically focused on drug manufacturing, she emphasized,

is offered by South Africa's Medical Research Council in conjunction with US-based Texas A&M University.

Although her Office has committed to assist, guide and provide information she encouraged SMU to also reach out, directly, to US universities with regard to academic exchange programmes and to the US State Department regarding leadership programmes such as the Young African Leadership Initiatives (YALI).

The productive meeting concluded with the following possible areas of collaboration being agreed upon:

- Joint research projects
- Staff and student exchange programmes
- Sharing research supervisory capacity
- Indigenous knowledge systems and clinical trials
- Climate change research and early warning systems
- Pandemic preparedness
- Joint programmes and degrees
- Biomedical research laboratory
- Scholarships to study abroad
- Bursaries for indigent students to study at SMU, and
- Support towards programmes such as "Hands of compassion"

In conclusion, both parties acknowledged the need for further engagements to refine the issues which have been identified for consideration.

~End~

