



SEFAKO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

Alumni



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**VC Prof Mbatia hosts
a delegation from
the Embassy of
the United States**



**I think that Alumni
should find it easy to
come in and build up
a funding system at SMU -
Prof ET Mokgokong**

In conversation with

Prof ET Mokgokong

Former Vice-Chancellor of Medunsa now SMU Professor Ephraim Thibedi Mokgokong was recently bestowed with the Order of Baobab in Gold by President Cyril Ramaphosa for his outstanding and excellent contribution to the medical sciences in South Africa. Mokgokong is known for having distinguished himself with his dedication to providing gynaecological services to poor women in rural areas. He has inspired many to follow the field of medicine and mentored a number of people during his career. Prof Mokgokong spoke to SMU Alumni reporter about his early years and career.

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Where were you born, grew up and matriculated?

I was born at Makotopong which is a Village that is 32 kilometers north of Polokwane on the N1. I started schooling there and I finished standard 6 at Segonye Botlokwa primary school, this was the largest primary school in the whole Botlokwa area so I did my standard 6 there. My secondary education I did at Johannesburg Bantu high school in western native Township which was just near Sophiatown. I lived in Sophiatown and that's where I matriculated.

What drove you to study medicine?

The start was really interesting until I wrote matric, I knew I wanted to be a scientist of sorts I was good with sciences, and very good with Maths and so on. My father was in charge of the post system in Makotopong. So when the results came out and I still remember it was the 15th of December that year, I was sitting with my immediate elder sister, and my father came in with the results from the post office that came through telegram, he gave me and I looked at them and I passed. He went away and came back 10 minutes later and asked, what do you want to be? My sister who was sitting next to me immediately said he is going to be a doctor and my father looked at me and asked if that was true, then I said yes and the rest is history. So my sister put the whole idea of being a doctor into me.

What makes a good medical practitioner?

Well I think the first thing we should never approach it as a money making business. In fact, you need to love helping people and that should be the basic thing in being a medical practitioner. I think I enjoyed that very much which is a very satisfying profession if one looks at helping people and when you are successful in doing that, you feel very good and fulfilled.

Being from the old school what do you think of today's medical practitioners, are they still driven by the same ethos like your generation?

I think overall they do, the only trouble is that in the funding system we had the third party, medical aid is a third party and I remember one of my contribution in medical and dental council where I attended the meetings before the medical aids were accepted, I said we'll rue the day when we let the third party have a say in how we fund medicine. They influence things badly in my view. I think we should have had a better system, maybe sort of you do with a car insurance where you pay for accidents.

How did your Journey with Medunsa start and unfold because you were based in Natal at some point?

The thing is you know there was an Advisory Council to the minister of Bantu Affairs and Education that I was really used to. It was made of some of the most educated black people I knew. They actually requested the development of such a University, it was not necessarily the idea of the white men, it was that committee because we were producing so few doctors from the medical schools and it was felt that something had to be done and they went to the ministers and they wanted a medical school. That is how the university started. That was one of the reasons when it came, I came up to take part and I was quite

aware that it was going to be an institution where children of black people were going to be taught medicine and my idea was that they had to be taught properly so. That's the first thing I did when I got there. I know when I moved from Natal to come here it caused a lot of political uproar but I knew I was doing the right thing and I'm saying history has shown that indeed I did the right thing, the results are there to see.

The first thing I did upon arrival was to try and get the curriculum to be at par with the curriculum of medicine in the country and we succeeded. It wasn't only our efforts, I think the vice chancellor then was a Prof Retief, who was an educationist and a nationalist but he was not a politician. So he agreed to changes and we got the right curriculum to teach at the new University. I then of course realized as I was working before I was Vice Chancellor that we were just window dressing. Producing fifty doctors a year at Medunsa would never get anywhere near meeting the needs of the country. So when I became Vice Chancellor, one of the first things to do was to try and change this and see how we can make a difference even in terms of facilities to teach.

We then quadrupled intake in my second year as VC and everybody thought it was wrong but it was the right thing as you can see today, be as it may it is the youngest medical school. Today, most people who are practicing medicine, especially black people are products of that University. So that's one of the things I felt very proud of and you know I instituted this at Medunsa against many people's wishes and I remember on my Christmas break in 1992, I spent a lot of time preparing for the 1993 academic year because that's when I just simply increased the intake and everybody thought it was madness. I said it's alright and I told people that there is intelligence in madness sometimes. I quietly worked on this and even the administration was not aware of what was to come.

Then 1993 came and was the second year intake when the closing date approached, I asked the men in charge of security to go around the campus and find anybody who has come to apply for second year medicine and they must come and queue to be assisted. They came and I was sitting there and admitted them if they qualified, my secretary at the time was also surprised at what was happening. When I got out there on that very first day, instead of 120 taken into second year I had 400 taken into the second year and of course it was an explosion but I worked out right solutions of what's going to happen, so I meant it.

What made Medunsa great at the time?

I did these things because I was simply a black farm boy who came from a rural area and I knew what type of education we came from. Before I became Vice - Chancellor I headed a committee that looked into what type of students succeed at Medunsa no other medical school has done this.

We discovered that the most important thing about whether students should get into second year or not was their mathematics and English and all other passes were not important at all. So from there we changed our intake based mainly on performance in mathematics and English. Further we looked at

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what level of mathematics and science pass, their sum total, what level in the study we carried would make the student succeed. We found that almost to any level the sum of those things if it was passed the candidate would ultimately qualify. We then used only levels of mathematics and science for admission. We did not care whether you then had another 20 distinctions, you became irrelevant. Space was the limitation. Surprisingly, most of these students performed well and I am very proud of them. In a research I headed at Medunsa before I was VC, I just used its findings when I became vice chancellor.

SMU has evolved, the institution continues to admit students from poor backgrounds, how can Alumni assist to raise funds for such students and for SMU?

One of the saddest things I must say is that I tried to develop an alumni basis. The idea was the alumni to raise enough money to have funding that can help the type of students we took. It is sad but I don't think Medunsa made a big enough alumni basis and I feel that one has failed on this. I started the alumni movement when I was there.

Basically it should not be difficult if you are a black man who come from this country. We come from a history where the politics disadvantaged us. We are living in a democracy that disadvantages others even further. So I think that alumni should find it easy to come in and build up a funding system at SMU to help others because it is unfortunate you know democracy is a great thing that came to us in 1994 but it has not borne the fruits and advantage we thought it would do.



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How do you feel about the honour bestowed upon you by president Ramaphosa?

I never did anything to think I would be awarded but I am totally humbled. I'm happy that people looked at what I have done and they thought I have done very much. I was just working, work that I think I didn't finish at the time I retired but I'm really humbled and grateful.

How free are we in South Africa?

We are free as we can vote. As I said democracy doesn't seem to have brought up the type of fruits we all looked at, and I think we are not using votes properly as well. I mean you see how a big city like Johannesburg metro which is where the money of the country is made can hardly have a municipality that spends time delivering services, instead spends time appointing mayors. It is really sad because things are getting bad the rules of democracy are there which we should be able to use but we're just not doing the same thing. I mean people that get elected are there for their personal needs and not for serving the people and this is sad. They are missing something, because one of the nicest things on this earth is to succeed serving people it is so rewarding but they are missing that completely.

What is your view about the National Health Insurance?

I think the ANC idea came from me in 1992 at my inaugural speech as Vice-Chancellor of Medunsa. I had done a lot of study about National Health Insurance and general health care the world over, I remember, I gave leaders of the ANC that paper and I think that is where it came from. I believe in the NHI. My problem is that at this moment, the way we are running things, I doubt whether a good thing like this will be good in practice. There is no doubt that you should not have healthcare because you do not have money. It's always been a bad approach People should have adequate healthcare for the diseases they have irrespective of their earnings.

What are your views about the state of our health care in the country?

I think its quality has dropped there is no running away from it. I mean there are backlogs, they never were backlogs. For instance, if you take Ga-Rankuwa hospital used to be a receiving centre for what you call Limpopo today, for most of what you call Mpumalanga and the Northern part of Northwest all were served there, but not a single department allowed the backlog to happen. For instance, if we booked patients for theatre today, you had to finish them because next week is already fully booked. The backlog starts developing from there, if you do not finish the ones from today when are you going to do them because there is no space next week and this is the problem. There might be other factors but, I do not think we are looking at the fact that we are dealing with a population that is basically poor, it has no facilities and we should things in such a manner that we serve them and not disadvantage them.

We also managed to speak to Mokgokong's two children Kgadi and Thabiso and this is what each of them said about their father:

"My father delivered me, said a proud Kgadi, who is a volunteer counsellor at Life Line and currently busy with her honours degree

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in psychology. We are very close, he has always tried to understand us as his children, he engages us and provides the necessary attention to all of us. We have always been empowered by that. As a father he has always wanted the best for his children. He will continuously drive excellence home”, she said. Basetsana recalls a moment when she got 98 percent in Mathematics and her father had to ask her what happened to the other two percent. “As you get older, you get to understand that you need to be excellent in what you do. My father also loved to cook whenever he was home. He loved his oxtail. He is forever working. He taught us all to braai including washing cars and changing car tyres. He is a very humble man, one who never boasts about his achievements”, Kgadi continued.

His youngest son, Thabiso who is a civil engineer says Prof Mokgokong influenced him greatly and encouraged him to always work harder. “My hard work is shown in everything I do, he always wants you to do more. Even when I get my appreciation, I know I still need to go for more. People at work often ask why am I always working and I attribute that to my father. At his age, he is still very active, he exercises and works. My wish is to just be half the man he is, concluded Thabiso.

The family is happy that finally, the country honoured their father while he is still alive and are very proud of this moment and all his achievements.



SMU VC hosts a delegation from the Embassy of the United States



On Wednesday, 05 July 2023, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbati 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.

Prof Mbati 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 Mbati 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 Mbati 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

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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~



Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University to collaborate with Wenzhou Medical University, China

A renewed Strategic Intent to be a leader in Health Education and Health Services



Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University's renewed strategic intent to be a leader in health education, health services, research and innovation that contributes to the advancement of human health, is contingent on leveraging on partnerships, linkages and inter-nationalization.

In support of this objective, coupled with a focus on expanding the University's global footprint, the Office of the Vice-Chancellor invited the People's Republic of China's South African Embassy representatives to visit the University in July 2022. The Chinese delegation to SMU was led by Mr. Long SHEN and the second Secretary for Science and Technology, Mr. Wei XIE. It was during these initial discussions that the highly ranked Wenzhou Medical University (WMU) was identified as the partner of choice for collaboration with SMU.

The initial engagements with WMU, which commenced in July 2022, led to the introduction of an Ophthalmology and Optometry Advanced training programme for staff and students. As part of this programme, that took place in October 2022, 15 experienced academics from both institutions had an opportunity to share their insights during the lectures, with over 30 South African clinicians having attended the programme.

The successful hosting of this specialist training programme highlighted the compatibility of the two institutions as dedicated health sciences uni-versities, and the mutually beneficial skills

and knowledge that could be shared between them. Against the backdrop of these initial engagements, on 10 May 2023 the President of WMU, Prof. Lyu Yijun and the SMU Vice Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbaty signed an MoU to formalize collaboration between the two sister universities.

Whilst recognizing that this MoU sets out a broad framework on matters that both institutions intend to pursue and collaborate their efforts, the following are the main objectives of the MoU:

- To provide a broad framework within which the two institutions can develop and undertake collaborative projects in areas of common interests in, amongst others, research, teaching and learning or other mutually agreed initiatives.
- To promote cooperation in teaching, learning and research through an international exchange of students and staff.

In his address at the signing of the MoU, the WMU Chancellor, Prof. Lyu Yijun reflected on the initial engagements between the two institutions pointing to the fact that the success of the Ophthalmology and Optometry Advanced training programme was a good start to the collaboration, which led to the signing of the MoU. He further highlighted the following key aspects:

- The Wenzhou Medical University, jointly established by the Ministry of Education, the National Health Commission and Zhejiang Provincial Government, is one

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of the Priority Development Universities in the Zhejiang Province. In the past three years, the University has steadily developed and improved on the quality of its educational provision. Their nine disciplines have entered the top 1% of ESI global rankings. The University has also established national key laboratories, National Engineering Research Center and several high-tech innovation platforms; recruiting high-level talents such as academicians, "outstanding youth", and Yangtze River scholars. WMU is among the top 100 universities in China in the Wushulian domestic University ranking, and ranks among the top 8 medical universities in the 2022 Shanghai Ranking Consultancy. With 5 affiliated hospitals, WMU enjoys abundant clinical resources, with the annual outpatient number exceeding 10 million.

- The signing of the MoU marks a new page of cooperation between WMU and SMU. Wenzhou Medical University will fully leverage our strength in medical education, research and healthcare to work closely with SMU and carry out multi-level collaboration in student and faculty exchange, joint research and publication, academic exchange and etc., setting an excellent example of China-South Africa collaboration in medicine and education as well as promoting the development of medicine in the two countries.

In his response, the SMU Vice Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbatia expressed appreciation for the Wenzhou Medical University's willingness to enter into a partnership with SMU and further highlighted the following:

- The two countries are friendly allies who cooperate, economically, as part of BRICS. This cooperation also lends itself to opportunities for collaboration in other sectors, such as higher education.
- As the only purely health sciences university in Southern Africa, fit-for-purpose and mutually beneficial partnerships are important to SMU academically, but also for expanding our University's

global footprint. In this context, this partnership between SMU and WMU will allow for knowledge and skills exchange, student and staff mobility, training of academics as well as executive management, collaborative research opportunities and virtual student and staff exchange.

- Being a niche university, research and innovation is extremely important for SMU which conducts research housed in various units: the Diarrhoeal Pathogens Research Unit, a designated World Health Organisation Regional Rotavirus Reference Laboratory and Collaborating Centre; the South African Vaccination and Immunisation Centre; MeCRU Clinical Research Unit; the HPV and STIs Training Centre for Africa; the SMU Minimal Invasive Surgery Unit; the HIV-1 Resistance and Molecular Lab; the Electron Microscope Unit; the HIV and Hepatitis Research Unit, who recently added a new niche area in the field of genetic diversity of coronaviruses; and the Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubation.

Prof. Mbatia concluded his remarks by stating that SMU views this partnership with WMU as a mutually beneficial collaboration which enables the sharing of knowledge between the two institutions, leveraging on each institution's strength.

In support of the signing of the MoU, Dr Prudence Makhura, Director: Inter-national Grants and Collaborative Initiatives at the National Research Foundation (NRF) stated that...

"The National Research Foundation (NRF) is in support of the MoU between Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University and the Wenzhou Medical University in China, especially, given the importance of China to South Africa, not only on a bilateral level but also as a member of BRICS. Health research is one of our strategic thematic research areas with our Chinese partners. We therefore, look forward to receiving research proposals between the two institutions when the SA-China Research Call (and the BRICS multilateral call) opens later in the year".



Picture supplied by Wenzhou Medical University, China

Sipho Mapfumari – Doctor of Philosophy in Pharmacy



SMU Alumnus Dr Sipho Mapfumari (32) promised himself that he won't leave the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) until he obtains his PhD degree. An accomplishment that he attained during the recently held Graduation Ceremonies. His research study was in response to a search for treatment and/or cure for the management or treatment of some of the life-changing and chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and stroke as well as the rise in resistance to current treatment by some of the common infectious bacterial species, and nature seems to be a perfect place for science to focus on. His thesis introduces the species *Viscum continuum* as one amongst many viable plants where this search can be directed. The plant is not cytotoxic and has anticancer properties against MCF7 and A549 cancerous cells as well as strong antioxidant activity. His research niche area is that of medicinal plants and their pharmacological properties. "It is a promise fulfilled, I promised myself that I will only leave SMU once I have worn a red gown. That was so that I can be a motivation to young people from the remote village I grew up in," said Dr Mapfumari.

Mapfumari is a fiancé and a father of twins (girls) who were born in 2023. He was born in July 1991 at Shiluvana hospital, Tzaneen. Through God's ways, his late father passed away in January of the same year, a few months before he was born and was then raised by a single mother. He started school at Xivodze primary school, then Mafarana Secondary and then attended two years at Cata High School (All in Mafarana village, near Tzaneen), before doing the rest of his high schooling year at Nkateko High School (Lulekani, Phalaborwa).

In high school, he was already known as a scientist as he was always participating in science competitions and was the first and the only one to have ever made it to the national finals of the Eskom Science expo from Nkateko High, a feat achieved in 2009. He has always been

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interested in leadership and attended several training camps. He has co-founded a non-profit organization known as ThinkBig39 which helps the underprivileged. During his student life, he was one of the most respected student political leaders on campus, having formed a political structure which still exists to date and allowed him to have a short stint as a member of the Student Representative Council (SRC). He was honoured as one of the 200 Young South Africans of the Year in 2018 through the Mail & Guardian publication. On top of him being the first to complete a Master of Science in record time from the Biochemistry department, today he is the first ever PhD graduate from the Department of pharmaceutical sciences, School of Pharmacy at SMU.

The possibility that he could one day contribute to the discovery of drug molecules which can be used to treat some of the world's notorious diseases triggered his interest in biochemistry, pharmaceutical sciences, and pharmaceutical chemistry. His PhD journey was not smooth sailing though, he converted the challenges he encountered into learning opportunities. "Every journey one takes will always have challenges but converting those challenges into learning opportunities is what can be the difference between

succeeding or not. Academically, the supervisory team I had was very supportive and the department assisted a lot financially as you would understand that carrying out lab-based research is not cheap. My fiancé was always there to help me navigate all the personal struggles and obstacles I faced," shares Mapfumari.

He further indicated that all his tertiary education qualifications were obtained at SMU, as a result of his underprivileged family background. "I knew I could not afford to pay for my studies and SMU is the only institution that is accommodative to the poor. I then fell in love with research done in the Biochemistry Department where I did my master's degree. In 2015, while doing my Master of Science degree, I got an opportunity to work with the Pharmacy students and that's when I realised that the School of Pharmacy is the one that would best position me on the right track to do what I love most. I then enrolled for PhD with the School of Pharmacy," remarks Mapfumari.

Now that he has completed his PhD studies, his ultimate goal is to become a Professor. "I only have one student that I have supervised and three whom I have co-supervised to completion, with 6 published papers so I am still very much a neonate in academia but hopefully one day I can reach that pinnacle. I just need to keep producing more postgraduates as well as publish more, then it will happen".

In every environment, he finds himself in a position to get involved and make a difference by doing something impactful. "I remember I was once asked, 'Why did I decide to donate the R10 000 which I once won in a competition to the SMU Hands of Compassion for the Needy Students?' My simple response was that I come from nothing, so I know how it feels like to have nothing at all and have to attend classes. Unless you once woke up attend class and go back to sleep without eating then you will see no need to give. So all the things I do for the community I do them to play my part in ensuring that those who are making an effort to better their lives do so in a conducive environment," said the legendary SMU community builder.



In conclusion, he sacrificed a lot to attain his PhD, missing several family gatherings in the process while trying to balance his studies and teaching responsibilities. "I grew to believe that tomorrow is a new day for me to start afresh and as long as I have a breath in me there is nothing insurmountable," said Mapfumari.

Tshepo Lechaba – Doctor of Philosophy in Medical Physiology

As a young man growing up in Kanana (Orkney), North West Province, Dr Tshepo Lechaba realised that there were many elderly people in his village suffering from chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, and diabetes, just to mention a few. He then developed an interest in wanting to know more diseases and started growing a research interest to become a scientist and this journey culminated with his recent graduation where he obtained a Doctor of Philosophy in Medical Physiology.

His PhD study focuses on risk factors of patients' heart failure patients with preserved ejection fraction (HFpEF), that is where systolic chamber function or contraction of the heart is still within normal limits. To achieve this, he investigated the prevalence of cardio-metabolic and lifestyle-modifiable risk factors in black South Africans with HFpEF in young-to-middle aged (18 to 64 years old) versus old people (≥ 65 years old). He further explored the interaction of modifiable risk factors associated with HFpEF on adverse cardiac effects including increased risk of diastolic and systolic dysfunction.

The findings from the study assist in the diagnosis and treatment of this phenotype in the clinical setting given the lack of effective primary treatment for the disorder. "I determined if the modifiable risk factors are associated with progression from a heart failure with preserved to reduced ejection fraction in black patients diagnosed with HFpEF. The primary findings of this study indicate that hypertension, overweight/ obesity,



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diabetes, and regular alcohol intake are the comorbidities and lifestyle risk factors that expose black people to this heart failure phenotype at an earlier age,” explained Dr Lechaba.

His interest in Medical Physiology was triggered during years of studying Bachelor of Science (BSc), choosing Physiology as one of his majors because it was interesting for him to study body systems and how everything coordinates so well. “I developed a huge interest in wanting to know more about how the body functions under normal circumstances and what happens in a state wherein there is any abnormality. I incorporated Pharmacology into my studies because I also wanted to know more about the different types of medications that can be administered if any body systems malfunction”.

Dr Lechaba plans to do more research on cardiovascular diseases and how they affect the body systems, in particular, to do more research on heart failure and also to supervise Honours, Master and PhD students. “One important thing is to publish in high-impact peer-reviewed journals and

become an NRF rated scientist so that one contributes to the research output of SMU and these achievements are shared globally. This will enable me to become a Professor, however, this will not be my only focus. I have other plans of broadening my support and administration path as I believe that I will not only be a Professor one day but will occupy key strategic executive positions”.

The difficulties he had to deal with during his studies were mostly the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of regulations, which stopped him from collecting data because the study participants were patients from various hospitals. Balancing his studies, work and family activities was made possible due to the support system he had. “I had to make time and one thing that I did was to always reserve weekends for the family because during the week I was extremely busy and the support I received from my family kept me going. At work, I knew that I had a weekly action plan that I was strict with and I pushed to achieve whatever I could. The one thing that kept me going was also the continuous support that I got from my supervisor, Prof Harold Majane and my line managers, Prof Chris de Beer (Former SMU Vice Chancellor) and Prof Lekan Ayo-Yusuf (Former SMU Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Postgraduate Studies & Innovation).

Interestingly, Lechaba never imagined advancing any career outside academia. However, in 2014 he got involved in politics, subsequently becoming the chairperson of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU). As a result of serving in several committees such as the SMU Council, he broadened his views on other career paths and how one can even grow outside of academia. “I took it as a challenge to learn more in terms of support and administrative duties and that is how I developed an interest in transformation management while at the same time continuing with research in the medical physiology,” said Lechaba, who is currently serving as the SMU Transformation Manager.

Lechaba has a mandate to transform his Alma Mater which he initially joined in 2003, where he started his BSc degree and completed in 2006. In 2007, he did his honours degree in Pharmacology, followed by an Honours in Physiology in 2008, then a Master in Physiology in 2009 and completed in 2011. “I had an opportunity to go and work thereafter for Ampath Laboratories as a Medical Scientist for two years and with an urge to do a PhD. I then came back in 2014 to work as a Senior Medical Technical Officer in the Department of Physiology. I took time to find a perfect research topic and wanted to work on something that would have an impact on society and in 2016, I registered for a PhD,” concluded Lechaba who grew up in a family of seven.



Phumzile Skosana – Doctor of Philosophy in Pharmacy



SMU Alumna and recent Doctor of Philosophy in Pharmacy graduate Phumzile Skosana was born in Dennilton and grew up in Daveyton (Ekurhuleni). She stayed with her grandmother and later with her parents and three siblings. She began Grade RR at Inkatha KwaZulu Primary School, then moved to Benoni Junior primary school from Grade 1. In Grade 4, she started at Rynfield Primary School and progressed from there to Jameson High School in Springs (Gauteng). She matriculated from Vector College in Johannesburg and began her higher education at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University in 2007 where she obtained her BPharm and subsequently went on to obtain her Masters degree in clinical pharmacy at the same institution. She got married to her best friend in 2013 and God has blessed them with three beautiful children, two girls and one boy. In her leisure time she enjoys singing and watching tennis and cricket.

Her PhD Studies

Dr Skosana obtained her PhD in 2022. The title of her study is: A Point Prevalent Survey of Antimicrobial Utilisation across Public Sector Healthcare Facilities in South Africa. She conducted a nationwide point prevalence survey (PPS) in healthcare facilities across South Africa, using a purpose-built web-based application, as part of mHealth. A total of 7 626 patient files were reviewed from 18 hospitals and 18 community healthcare centres (CHC) across the nine provinces. Overall, 33.1% of patients had received at least one antimicrobial, ranging from 34% adults in hospitals, 22% in

CHCs and 50% amongst paediatric patients. One major disturbing finding was the unavailability of culture results in the files which was less than 40% for all the population groups. The web-based PPS tool was easy to use and successful in capturing data, making the results comparable to other PPS studies across Africa. The findings will assist policymakers and programme managers with future targets to improve antimicrobial utilisation and surveillance among public hospital sectors in South Africa and Primary healthcare facilities, aimed at curbing the development of antimicrobial resistance.

Research Niche Area

Her main core interest is in Infectious diseases with other research interests as follows:

- Antibiotic Resistance, Utilisation and Stewardship
- Pharmaceutical care and Drug Therapy Management looking at medication errors

As a young pharmacist, she is working in the field of antimicrobial resistance focusing on how to decrease its prevalence among patients. Her PhD studies focused on how to use antimicrobials because this is directly linked to the increase in resistance.

“When conducting research, I try to explore other ways pharmacists can help reduce irrational prescribing of antibiotics and also to try to locate where the most irrational use is found/detected. All my research focus is on improving the use of antimicrobials in our community” elaborates Dr Skosana.

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This further strengthened her love for clinical pharmacy and has ignited her interest in primary health care and working in a multi-disciplinary team with another healthcare professional for the positive outcome of our community.

Challenges experienced during PhD studies

The greatest challenge was the time she missed to be with her husband and kids which she says she will never get back. "It's lovely to know that they understood and never gave up on me. I am forever grateful. Trying to balance work and personal life also was tough. The other challenge was - getting approvals from the different provinces and sites. It was a nightmare. Travelling across all provinces' collecting data was physically tiring indeed and it made it hard to try to keep up with other daily work expected of and from me, but I soldiered on and the rest is history," shares Dr Skosana.

Choosing a Career in Pharmacy

She always knew that health was her interest, however, she never knew in what area. But she didn't want to be a medical doctor or a nurse because, in her mind, those professions were associated with seeing blood and treating dying patients. "During a career expo in matric, I heard about pharmacy and that one can be lab-based to make, medication, right there, I knew that was for me. I then applied, not knowing how broad the profession is until I started studying the course. I am blessed to say, I'm happy with the decision I took and can't imagine doing anything else," she reminisces.

Her passion for knowledge sharing

In high school, she was teaching Mathematics in higher grade to grade 11 and 12 learners. She realised from there that sharing knowledge only made it much clearer for her and increased her understanding of the work. In church, she was a Sunday school teacher, and this grew till now as she oversees the youth at church. A great influence was her mom who was a teacher and was studying till her last day on earth. "I believe teaching was already channelled within me and needed a guide. My facilitators and lecturers explained to me about doing an academic internship and that I will assist with facilitation and teaching, I knew that was my calling. It is more like the career chose me than the other way around".

SMU as an Institution of Choice

The pedagogy/method of learning and teaching in the BPharm programme is Problem-based learning, student-centred and different from traditional methods, so she got to know the university as a home. All the studying and the fact that she had facilitators in the School of Pharmacy, who were always willing to help the students to achieve their goals, gave her confidence that she can achieve anything she set her mind on. "For the first time in my life, I had a mentor when I got to the university, and this was a guiding hand, so I knew that in pursuing my future career, I would have all the help and support I needed. The staff was always willing to help and give guidance which



made it easier to come back and carry on with my studies at this facility," said Skosana who acquired all her tertiary education qualifications from SMU.

Having a Support System

"I have an amazing support cycle and they keep me on my toes to always do better. My husband and my kids always remind me that giving up is not an option. When I remember how hard my mom worked to protect us and to try to make sure we had a good future, I know I was raised by a strong woman and needed to keep going. I have a lot of people always rooting for me and there even when I fall, so this keeps me going".

She gets inspired and motivated every time she sees students doing well. When she listens to how she played a role in shaping their careers and changing their situations at home, she gets motivated and keeps going. The university has a lot of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and seeing them achieve and succeed in their academics as a mentor and help them, gives meaning to all she does.

Her Short- and Long Term Goals

"To be honest, I have told myself to try to build myself in research and become an established academic first. The professorship is the next step when one is in academia, and I believe and trust this will also come at the right time. I do not want to feel overwhelmed, but it will fit in with God's plan for my life. No pressure" concludes Skosana.

Academic Elected to Serve in the SMU Council



In a historic move, Mr Mashudu Nemukula was recently elected to serve as the first academic representative on the council of his alma mater, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). He is mandated to advocate for the needs of academic employees and provide inputs on issues related to academic policy, procedures, and programmes.

Mashudu is a Lecturer and a PhD candidate in the department of Biochemistry and Biotechnology at SMU. He was born on May 06, 1990, in Ngulumbi, Limpopo Province, South Africa. He is the son of Nkhumeleni Ronald Nemukula and Emily Mashudu Masevhe. Mashudu grew up in a very poor family background with four of his siblings (Nditamani, Nkhumeleni, Elelwani and the Late Ndamulelo). His grandmother, Matevhutevhu Masevhe and his parents instilled a love of education. He attended primary school at Almighty Learning Centre from the year 1996 to 2003 and his high school days at Marude Secondary School from the year 2004 to 2007.

After graduating from high school, Mashudu attended the University of Venda, where he earned a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree majoring in Biochemistry and Microbiology, in 2011. He then went on to attend his postgraduate studies at the University of Limpopo (Medunsa Campus), where he completed his BSc (Honours) degree in Biochemistry (2012).

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In 2019, He obtained a Master's degree in Biochemistry (Cum Laude) at the newly established Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), under the supervision of the late Professor Motetelo Alfred Mogale. His research studies focused on the association between cigarette smoking and cardiovascular disease such as peripheral arterial disease. He was also part of those who pioneered the existing SMU Corporate Store. He later joined the Department of Biochemistry and Biotechnology as a permanent staff member where he is currently a course coordinator for Biotechnology for undergraduate students. He is also currently under the supervision of Dr Stanley Gololo and Prof Harold Majane at SMU for his PhD studies.

Today, Mashudu lives with his beautiful wife Dr Sonwabiso Mema. He remains an influential figure in the community of SMU academics and postgraduate students, and his contribution as an activist for progress and success will continue to inspire generations to come.

Alumni Newsletter Reporter spoke conducted this interview with Mashudu to know more about his obligation as an academic representative in the council.

Congratulations on being elected as an Academic Employee Representative in Council, briefly tell us what your role in Council is.

Thank you for the congratulatory message! As an Academic Employee Representative in Council, my role is to represent the interests and concerns of the academic employees at the university in Council meetings. The role includes attending and actively participating in Council meetings, advocating for the needs of academic employees, and providing inputs on issues related to academic policy, procedures, and programmes. Congruently, I work collaboratively with other Council members to make decisions that promote the academic mission and goals of the university, while ensuring that the interests of the academic employees are taken into account.

What triggered your interest to serve in the institution's council?

Many individuals are motivated to serve on a university council for a variety of reasons. Some may have a passion for higher education and a desire to contribute to the development and success of an institution, which is a very important factor. Others may have expertise or experience that they believe could be valuable to the council and the institution. Still, others see serving on a council as an opportunity to network and build relationships with other professionals in their field. In the case of SMU, I believe many individuals with a background or interest in health sciences are particularly motivated to serve given the university's focus on this area. These individuals serve on the council as an opportunity to contribute to the advancement of healthcare education and research, and to help shape the future of healthcare in their community and beyond.

Ultimately, serving on the university council can be a rewarding experience for those who are passionate about higher education, committed to academic excellence, and motivated to contribute to the success of an institution. Congruent to the above statement, what triggered my interest to serve on the university council was the fact that issues of academic employees were neglected for a very long time, and it was high time that academic issues are placed at the centre of the universities operation. Also amongst many other reasons, council membership provides opportunities for personal and professional growth, such as developing leadership skills, learning about the institution's governance structure, and gaining a deeper understanding of the institution's policies and procedures, which will then enable me to have the experience to becoming a potential Vice Chancellor of the university one day.

In line with the SMU Strategic Plan 2021-2025, how will your election to represent academics in the SMU council contribute to achieving the Strategic Objectives of Teaching, Learning, Research, and Community Engagement?

As an Academic Representative in SMU Council, there are many potential ways one can contribute to achieving the Strategic Objectives of Teaching, Learning, Research, and Community Engagement:

Teaching: Advocating for policies and initiatives that support the development and delivery of high-quality, innovative teaching programmes. This could involve working with other Council members and stakeholders to identify best practices and opportunities for improvement, promoting the use of technology and other resources to enhance teaching and learning, and ensuring that teaching programmes are aligned with the needs of the healthcare sector and the broader community.

Learning: Advocating for policies and initiatives that support the development and delivery of effective and relevant learning experiences for students. This could involve working with other Council members and stakeholders to identify and address barriers to learning, promoting the use of experiential learning and other forms of hands-on education, and advocating for the development of academic employee support programmes that promote academic success.

Research: Advocating for policies and initiatives that support the development and implementation of cutting-edge research programmes. This could involve working with other Council members and stakeholders to identify and address barriers to research, promoting the use of collaborative research initiatives, and advocating for the development of research support programs that promote excellence in research and innovation.

Community Engagement: Advocating for policies and initiatives that support the development and implementation of community outreach and service programmes. This could involve

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working with other Council members and stakeholders to identify and address the community needs of academic employees, promoting the use of community-based learning initiatives, and advocating for the development of community engagement programmes that promote community health and well-being.

Overall, this position will enable me to advocate for policies and initiatives that promote academic excellence, collaboration, innovation, and community impact which will subsequently contribute to achieving the Strategic Objectives of Teaching, Learning, Research, and Community Engagement.

Bearing in mind your new role in the SMU Council and as an alumnus, what do you envisage for the academic enterprise of the institution?

I envisage the academic enterprise of SMU to prioritize and promote academic excellence, research excellence, and innovation in teaching and learning. This could involve attracting and retaining world-class faculty, enhancing the quality of the curriculum and pedagogy, and investing in cutting-edge research and development.

Secondly, the institution could further strengthen its focus on health sciences education and research, with an emphasis on addressing the unique health challenges faced in South Africa and the African continent. This could involve developing and expanding its programmes in science and technology such as biological sciences, biochemistry, statistics, mathematics and computer sciences; and health sciences, medicine, nursing, and allied health professions, and investing in research that addresses key health issues such as infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, and healthcare delivery in underserved communities.

Thirdly, SMU could prioritise the development of future academic and healthcare professionals who possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and values to provide high-quality healthcare services to the population. This could involve integrating industry-relevant skills and experiential learning opportunities into the curriculum, providing students with clinical exposure and practical training, and nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset among students and faculty.

Lastly, the institution could further develop its role as a thought leader and contributor to the wider community, both locally and globally. This could involve promoting public discourse on critical health issues, engaging in community service and outreach programmes, and collaborating with other institutions and organizations to tackle global health challenges.

Overall, by prioritising academic excellence, promoting health sciences education and research, developing future health-care professionals, and contributing to the wider community, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University could continue to be a

leading institution of higher learning in South Africa and the African continent.

Your election into Council comes with huge responsibilities which need you to contribute to identified critical success factor which requires effective institutional governance and academic administration, on behalf of academics, what contributions are you likely to bring to achieve that?

Firstly, effective communication and collaboration between the academic community and the Council could be critical to achieving effective institutional governance and academic administration. As an academic representative, I could facilitate this communication and collaboration by serving as a liaison between the academic community and the Council, conveying the perspectives and concerns of the academic community to the Council, and keeping the academic community informed about the Council's decisions and actions.

Secondly, I could contribute to the development and implementation of policies and strategies that support effective institutional governance and academic administration. This could involve collaborating with other Council members and stakeholders to identify and address issues related to governance and administration, and working to develop and implement policies and procedures that promote transparency, accountability, and effectiveness.

Thirdly, I could advocate for the interests of the academic community in Council discussions and decisions. This could involve raising issues and concerns relevant to academics, providing input and feedback on proposals and initiatives, and ensuring that academic perspectives are taken into account in decision-making processes.

Lastly, I could promote a culture of continuous improvement and learn within the academic community and the Council. This could involve fostering a culture of openness to feedback, encouraging innovation and experimentation, and supporting ongoing professional development for academics and Council members alike.

Overall, by facilitating communication and collaboration, contributing to policy development and implementation, advocating for academic interests, and promoting a culture of continuous improvement, academic representatives on the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University Council can help to achieve effective institutional governance and academic administration.

In conclusion, is there any information that you deem necessary for the benefit of our readers?

Since the inception of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, it's the first time the institution is filling the position of an academic representative in the Council after eight years of the position being vacant.

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I would like to emphasize the importance of effective institutional governance and academic administration in achieving the strategic objectives of any university.

University councils play a critical role in shaping the direction and priorities of an institution, and academic representatives on these councils have an important responsibility to ensure that the needs and interests of faculty and students are represented and advocated for. By promoting policies and initiatives that support teaching, learning, research, and community engagement, academic representatives can contribute to the success of their institution and the broader healthcare sector.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize the significance of health sciences education and research, particularly in light of the ongoing global health crisis. Institutions like Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University have a critical role to play in training the next generation of academia and healthcare professionals and advancing scientific knowledge in areas like public health and epidemiology. Academic representation on the university council has a unique opportunity to help shape the future of healthcare education and research and to contribute to the health and well-being of their communities and beyond.



Gugu Dhlamini

receives her third qualification from SMU and goes for more



Gugulethu Nonhlanhla Dhlamini is a 26-year-old, originally from Soweto, Johannesburg. She is a born again Christian, a leader, a passionate scientist and innovator as well as an entrepreneur. She is also a spoken word poet and performer. Gugu recently graduated again from SMU and she opened up to share her journey with our readers.

When did you start studying at SMU and how many qualifications do you have?

-I started study at SMU in the year 2017 doing my undergraduate degree in B.Sc Life Science ecp. Thus far I have obtained three degrees; the first being an undergraduate degree in Bachelor of Science degree in Life Science ecp, the second being a Bachelor of Science Hons degree in Zoology and lastly Bachelor of Science Medical Hons in Medical Microbiology. I am currently studying towards a Master of Science degree in Medicine (Medical Microbiology).

How would you describe SMU to someone who has not been here?

SMU through the lens of my own experience is an intellectual Hub that is rich in history and carries so much potential. In my

experience SMU has offered me an opportunity to stretch my capacity, shape my interests and passions in Medical science.

What has been your experience as a student at SMU since your first qualification?

-Coming into SMU I didn't have much expectations as I hadn't heard about it before, however the existing social structure helped me adapt to the new culture and find my own feet.

In my first year I formed part of the House committee leaders as the Sports officer for the residence I resided in namely; 'Tshwane varsity Lodge'. This immediately allowed me to create an environment that stretched my ability and pushed me towards growth. In the same year I got involved with a social structure called 'Green campus initiative' as a secretary. The following year in 2018, I was introduced to student entrepreneurship and became part of SMU first Student Entrepreneurship Hub called 'Student Entrepreneurship & Innovation Hub' and served as its Public relations officer. Today I sit as the chairperson of this Hub.

What makes SMU special?

Every year SMU opens its doors to black children coming from

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disadvantaged background, who would never thought its possible due to their financial backgrounds. Many of us are the first in our families to graduate and SMU has contributed to this. So, we are extremely grateful for the opportunity and forever motivated to keep pressing forward. Although we stumble into challenges at times, the thought that it will be worth it at the end keeps us going.

Are you still involved with student entrepreneurship activities, what has been the lessons since you became active?

Yes I am still involved with Student Entrepreneurship through the Student Entrepreneurship & Innovation Hub (SEIH) and Entrepreneurship development in Higher Education (EDHE). The biggest lesson I have learnt thus far is, 'We build our plane while learning how to fly it' and this simply means that you may not have all the knowledge and skills you need to build and finish your dream in a day however, with what you have it is enough to start where you are until you get to where you want to be. Don't get stuck planning, take the little that you know and start building. Second lesson I've learnt is that if you can identify a problem, then focus on ways to solve that problem and in doing so, find a way to monetize that solution. This is how businesses are born.

Would you advice fellow students to take the entrepreneurship path?

Yes, I would whole heartedly encourage more students to partake in entrepreneurship programs while learning. Starting a business post university carries a lot of risks and very little of room to make mistakes without suffering great losses. However, starting while you are a student allows you to take more risks with more room to fall, get up and start afresh. This is because you don't have a lot more to lose when you start earlier than leaving it for later on.

Where are you working currently and how is the experience so far?

I currently work for South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) as a junior Scientist and sampler. It has been such an amazing experience so far, I am able to put to practice all that I learnt in theory during my Honors degree journey. My passion for science keeps growing by the day.

During weekends, I also work at Next Biosciences as a weekend Technician, so far it has been a thrilling experience. One thing I have learnt about science is that, it is not restrictive. The opportunities brought by it are endless. However, you need to be a hard worker, patient and persistent to make it in the field.





Japhtha Phala —

President of
SMU Convocation

Congratulations on being elected the President of the SMU Convocation, briefly tell us about your role in the Convocation.

Let me firstly send my gratitude to every convocator for the vote of confidence and the responsibility bestowed to me and the collective executive of the convocation. Well, as a President of SMU Convocation primarily, I play an ambassadorial role and help the institution to achieve its strategic goals and objectives, obviously with the collective effort from the executive of Convocation. By being a President of Convocation I am a member of the University Council.

Take us through your journey?

I was born in June 1993 in a small village called Mamone (Jane Furse), in Sekhukhune and attended my primary and secondary schools in the village until I moved to SMU. I studied for my undergraduate degree (Bachelor of Dental Therapy) here at our University. While in my junior years, I developed an interest in student politics

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and I rose within the leadership ranks of the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA), we won the SRC elections and I became SRC President in 2014/2015.

Immediately after our term of office, we joined #FeesMustFall movements across the country and I was part of the coordinating team of #FeesMustFall in Gauteng. We were moving across the province leading student protests in pursuit of Free Quality Education for all.

I and other radical forces in the University took a deliberate decision to challenge the University on behalf of Workers (Cleaners, Gardeners, Security officers etc.) to collapse tendering systems and to employ them permanently. Those intra-institutional contradictions led to the formation of the #OutsourcingMustFall Movement which we were leading and at the end, all workers were absorbed by the University. Thanks to all student comrades like the now Secretary of SMU Convocation, Sello Madibela, and Vusi Mahlangu to mention a few.

I am convinced with my good governance and leadership record I left an indelible mark which informed the call for me to lead University Convocation as its President.

How will your previous experience in student governance assist you in leading the Convocation as its president?

Being in Student Governance has taught me a lot about University policies, operational procedures and statutory governance structures. I was a member of the University Council and Senate before, therefore I know quite well what my statutory mandate is as a member of the above-mentioned governance structures, and with the experience of leading a collective, this will be done with ease.

One of the functions of the Convocation is to facilitate liaison between the University and its former students and academic employees, which strategies will you apply to achieve that?

The Executive Committee of Convocation will soon commence the process of launching Chapters across the country to organize former students of the University to maximize their influence in the affairs of the University and for them to play a significant role back to their Alma Mater. We will keep regular communication with our graduates and academic staff to inform them of our events. I am strongly convinced that the prospect of our University relies on the success and participation of its graduates.

You are also required to create networks and canvass support for the strategic objectives of the University, and organise former students and academic employees with a view of facilitating representation of this constituency on appropriate governance structures, which projects will you be undertaking to accomplish this?

Objectively we need to work on enhancing the profile and reputation of the University to better attract strategic individuals and organizations to positively and massively contribute to the growth and development of the University. However, like I said among other things is to launch Provincial chapters to draw closer influential former students. It is also our mission to participate in national discourses to position the University at the Centre of the national and international narrative, this will uplift the flag of our Institution to be among the distinguishable Universities in the country and abroad. Regularly, we will meet with potential donors, be they individuals, foundations, institutes and corporate establishments to establish relations and canvass financial support on behalf of the University. But there are many initiatives especially fundraising opportunities which I cannot mention at the moment because we are yet to discuss them comprehensively as a collective.

As an Alumnus of the University, you are familiar with the challenges that face the institution, what are your plans to address that?

Having been in the University for quite some time, I am well informed of its challenges and developments. Like any other black-dominated university, there are financial and social challenges that the University is battling with since time immemorial because the University caters for students who are from underprivileged backgrounds and rely squarely on NSFAS funding. Hence our primary focus on fundraising is imperative to help the University off its financial burden through constant engagements with potential donors. We operate in a multi-stakeholder organization therefore it is important to work collectively with student leadership, worker unions and University management to compliment and criticise one another when one has done wrong.

We must engage DHET to review its funding model of the University because our University is among those who are underfunded, be it because of our enrolment numbers and research outputs. Part of our plans is to support our research departments and academic staff to encourage them to be active in research and innovation and that will come in handy for the University. We also need to look at building of On-Campus residences, facilities and entertainment areas for students.



Elifolet Bhembe - Vice-President of the SMU Convocation

Congratulations on being elected the Vice-President of the SMU Convocation, briefly tell us about your role in the Convocation.

As the Vice-President of the Convocation of SMU, my role is to support the strategic objectives of the institution as determined by the Management and approved by the Council while at the same time encouraging a link between the Alumni and the institution and supporting the President and the Convocation at large.

Tell us about yourself?

Elifolet Bhembe is just an ordinary boy from a quintile 7 school who grew up in a rural village and studied there and had to grow from there to where he is today. By the age of 13, I had lost both of my parents and had to wait for my sister to complete her studies and start working for me to commence my studies. She inspired me studying the course that I did with this beloved institution of mine.

How will your previous experience in student governance assist you in leading the Convocation as its Vice President?

Having been in student governance helps as I have a broader and better understanding of student needs and typical management responses and that is where we need to intervene and bridge the gap to help the institution to grow. One might say in our regime we took the students to the streets a lot but from that, we learned a lot and I can say that it is not always the best solution provided all parties come to the table in time to resolve the issues of the day.

One of the functions of the Convocation is to facilitate liaison between the University and its former students and academic employees, which strategies will you apply to achieve that?

There can but only be one solution to this, which is a sense of belonging. If people feel like they belong to a particular home they will AUTOMATICALLY feel a need to contribute to that home and that is the base which we will be building from. We will only try to remind people of their home which is the FARM as it is commonly

referred to by the latter graduates and Medunsa by the other graduates.

You are also required to create networks and canvass support for the strategic objectives of the University, and organise former students and academic employees with a view of facilitating representation of this constituency on appropriate governance structures, which projects will you be under-taking to accomplish this?

Firstly we need to get in line and contribute towards the strategic objectives of the University because we cannot support what we don't understand. Once we know and are completely in line with the strategic objectives of the institution we will completely throw our weight behind the objectives and work towards making them a reality. The only way to liaise between the institution and its Alumni is by bringing forth meaningful projects in which the Alumni can be part of this exciting project called SMU, after all we are children of Ntate Sefako Makgatho. I also hold a very strong view that the Convocation must be represented on all structures of the institution, that is including the Senate and Institutional forum and I will even go as far as saying that even in the management of the institution because we hold first-hand experience of the institution and understand the challenges it faces.

As an Alumnus of the University, you are familiar with the challenges that face the institution, what are your plans to address them?

The biggest challenge that existed before our coming into office as an executive of the convocation from my point of view for the institution has been communication between the instructional management and the people the institution seeks to serve, which are the students. If we can get that part right, it will limit the negative publicity and association of the institution with strikes and all sorts of unnecessary protest actions.



Sello Madibela –

Secretary of the SMU Convocation

Congratulations on being elected the Secretary of the SMU Convocation, briefly tell us about your role in the Convocation.

As the Secretary of Convocation, I will be dealing with the administration of the structure, ensuring that the executive executes their mandate as prescribed in the University statute. The Secretary also must support members in their respective roles.

Who is Sello Madibela?

I was born in Bochum, outside Polokwane but grew up in Thabazimbi, Limpopo. Did my Primary at Yesterberg Primary School then completed my Secondary school at Groenvlei Secondary School in 2013. In 2014, I then enrolled for a Bachelor of Nursing Science and Art (BNSA) at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). During my studies at SMU, I was elected to serve as the Secretary General of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and also served in the University Council.

How will your previous experience in student governance assist you in leading the Convocation as its Secretary?

Having served as the Secretary of the SRC, I believe I am well-equipped to carry out the duties that come with the office. It is going to be important to keep our members informed of the latest developments within the University, and also ensure that they contribute to their Alma Mater. This however can only be achieved through proper communication, and the office of the Secretary is in a position to do that.

One of the functions of the Convocation is to facilitate liaison between the University and its former students and academic employees, which strategies will you apply to achieve that?

- We want to bridge the gap between the university and its former students. We all have a role to play in

ensuring that the vision and mission of this University are realized.

- One thing that strengthens a structure is to have regular meetings. As the Executive we have taken a position to have regular meetings so that we can be able to execute our mandate.
- This is a structure that in representing former students from the time of MEDUNSA, so I am of the view that they also have an idea of the direction the university should take. So we must create a platform for them to make meaningful contributions.

You are also required to create networks and canvass support for the strategic objectives of the University, and organise former students and academic employees with a view of facilitating representation of this constituency on appropriate governance structures, which projects will you be undertaking to accomplish this?

Assist the university in mobilizing resources to ensure that it continues to cater for the poor and dejected masses of our people. The majority of our graduates play an integral role in this country and the diaspora, and they went through the challenges the university is still experiencing today. We need to bring them closer to make a meaningful contribution. However, the university must also be of benefit to them.

The university has a vision of growing its numbers shortly, in terms of programmes it will be offering and the number of students. This will require infrastructure and resources. An idea like this is going to require contributions from all stakeholders.

Academic staff need to be encouraged to do research and publish their work that will assist the university in terms of ranking and all that. The curriculum of all programmes needs to be reviewed, as

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we have schools that are still using a curriculum of the time of MEDUNSA.

Develop a business model for the university to generate 3rd stream income, in terms of a Private Hospital, Private accommodation for Dr George Mukhari Hospital staff, those working in Wonderpark and others.

Companies like FNB that are currently getting free publicity through the FNB building must also come to the party. We can't continue giving people a free platform to advertise while they don't contribute anything. The university must benefit from this.

For as long we can be able to assist the university with generating income, it will continue to be a beacon of hope for the hopeless, and those that have been written off.

Remofilwe Poeng -

Additional Member to the Convocation Executive

Who is Remofilwe Poeng?

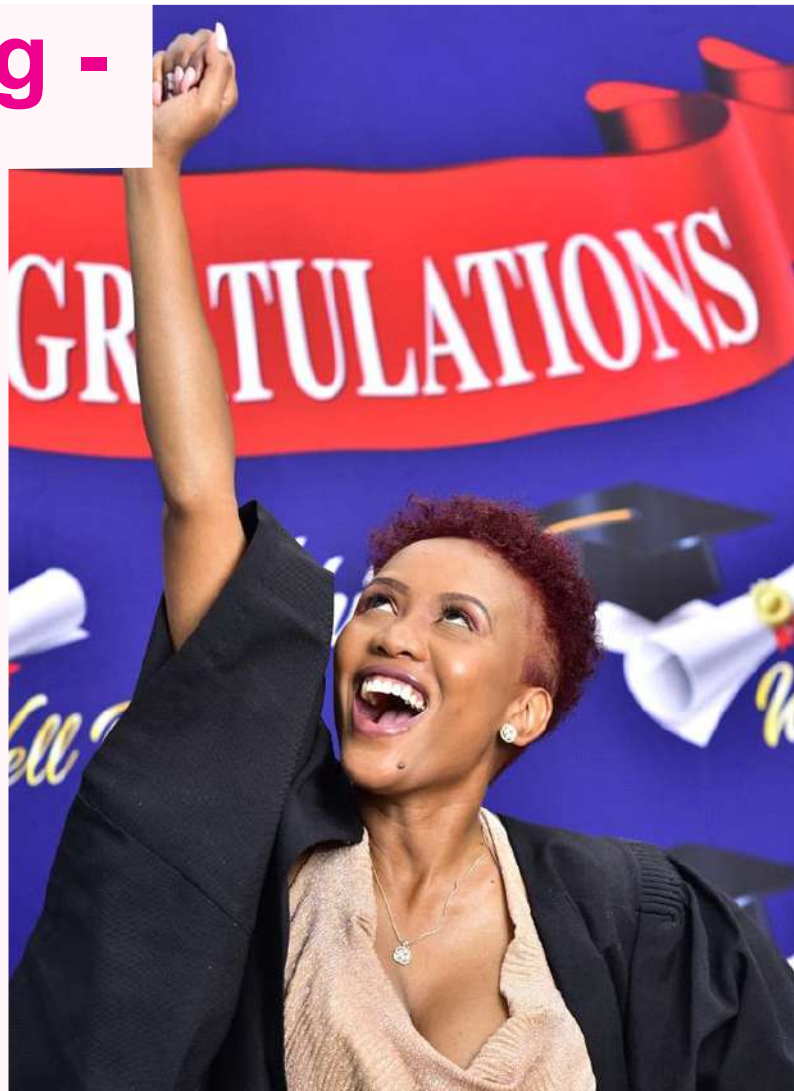
Remofilwe is a very ambitious and focused young lady who was born in Mafikeng where she spent some of her life but eventually came to Gauteng as a result of her parents getting better opportunities in Pretoria. I attended part of my primary school years in Mafikeng at a school called Connie Manchin Primary School then came to Pretoria in grade 5 where I studied at SA College Private School. I then decided to go back to Mafikeng to stay with my grandmother from grade 10 till matric where I studied at Sol Plaatjie Secondary School. My school life was generally a walk in the park with a few mishaps here and there but nothing hectic. Post-matric I had applied to a couple of universities and was accepted at a few most for programs I wasn't passionate about. I came to SMU when it was the University of Limpopo not sure of what I wanted to become. Since I had a bursary which required me to major in Math and Chemistry, I then studied BSC in Physical Sciences. In my second year I realized that this was not for me since I loved working with young children and human interaction was my strong point especially from being a Sunday school teacher all my high school life. I then decided to change my stream to the occupational stream. This worked for me even though during my studies I faced exclusion. I then continued and started a new course which was Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology, this one I loved and I had chosen it for myself. I am currently an SMU graduate in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology who recently opened her practice (Remo_Poeng the speech therapist and Audiologist) which is based in the CBD. Through it, all my resilience got me to where I am today.

Briefly tell us about your role in the Convocation

I am an additional member of the Convocation Executive. We all have an intertwined role in the team which ultimately works towards raising funds for the institution which will help with historical debts, building a working relationship between the University and its Convocants and networking. These are just some of the duties that we are tasked with.

How will your previous experience in student governance assist you in being an additional member of the Convocation?

Of course, my leadership skills were well-groomed and nurtured during my student governance days. Furthermore, I learnt a lot about impartiality and respect during those days and will bring this into the role.



One of the functions of the Convocation is to facilitate liaison between the University and its former students and academic employees, which strategies will you apply to achieve that?

Well, social media platforms are one of our strategies, as well as hosting social events, lectures, academic structures and chapters to name a few.

As an alumna of the University, you are familiar with the challenges that face the institution, what are your plans to address that?

There are several challenges currently faced by the institution of which one cannot use the same approach for all. So in each of the identified pertinent challenges, there are specific strategies in place which target a specific challenge, for example, the establishment of a Placement program which will help prepare our graduates for the corporate world and through which some might even find employment. This is just one of the strategies that are in place.



Fumani Shipalana -

Additional member of the SMU Convocation

private health practice and currently the executive director in Foodietics operating in private health practice.

How will your previous experience in student governance assist you in being an additional member of the Convocation?

Given the exposure provided by having served within the Student Affairs multiple times, the experience gives me an edge particularly because I have encountered and dealt with several issues as a student leader which makes me an asset for convocation to be utilised in problem-solving to enhance the Convocation and the university.

Briefly tell us about your role in the Convocation

To provide support to the entire Executive of the convocation in activities that are to be deemed necessary by the structure as there are no specific assigned roles for additional members in the statute.

Who is Fumani Shipalana?

I am a resilient African man who was born and bred in the outskirts of South Africa in the province of Limpopo in Tzaneen. Born just before the dawn of democracy to a single young mother, who left me under the care of my grandparents. Started my educational journey in a Preschool named Bright Morning Star and later went to Bombeleni for my primary school and this is where I took an interest in poetry, storytelling and debating.

I started and finished his High school in Hudson Ntsanwisi secondary school where my activism started and I took part in defiance campaigns to not wear full school uniform in solidarity with pupils who couldn't afford a full uniform and would be denied entry to the school due to not being in full uniform. The campaign led to fundraising to buy uniforms for all deserving pupils.

After finishing Matric, I was admitted to the University of Limpopo Medunsa Campus which later transitioned to Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, enrolling in the Bachelor of Sciences in Molecular Life program. As soon as arriving on campus one took a keen interest in student activism and joined Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) where my political consciousness was fully awakened with the inspiration and ideological teachings of Robert Sobukwe, Steve Bantu Biko, Marxism and Leninism. I later joined The Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command and represented students in the SRC several times championing student issues and also took part in the fees must fall struggle. I completed two degrees BSc (UL Medunsa) and Dietetics (SMU). I subsequently worked in the rural areas of North West as a community service Dietitian and later Joined Sambo Dietetics in

One of the functions of the Convocation is to facilitate liaison between the University and its former students and academic employees, which strategies will you apply to achieve that? You are also required to create networks and canvass support for the strategic objectives of the University, and organise former students and academic employees with a view of facilitating representation of this constituency on appropriate governance structures, which projects will you be undertaking to accomplish this?

By creating an environment that makes it easy for graduates and academic employees to identify with and embody the university in many facets of their lives. If graduates can deem the university beneficial to them even after completion of their studies it will be easy for graduates to identify and still feel they belong to the University. The Convocation will create network platforms within its constituency in different regions and locations making it much easier for graduates to exchange information and resources to better build one another, which will therefore make them realise the benefits of still associating with the university and contribute to strengthening the institution.

The academic employees need to be rebranded as the leaders of exciting, cutting-edge research in the country, who bring solutions to problems facing society at large, this can only be achieved by galvanising resources and state-of-the-art equipment to help bring competition amongst departments in outperforming one another with a structured incentives program to help build strong academic staff that is proud of belonging to the university. The convocation will undertake projects such as gala dinners, memorial lectures and exhibitions to organise, mobilise resources and strengthen the liaison between graduates, academic staff and the university.



Dr Zukiswa Gonya - Convocation member to serve on the Council of the University

Congratulations on being elected Convocation member to serve on the Council of the University, briefly tell us about your role in the Council.

Thank you so much for the opportunity. I'm blessed to serve on the university council which is a very important and high decision-making body. It is in my interest to participate with due diligence in decision-making informed by researched knowledge and through fair negotiations for the benefit of the students and the university.

I will represent the university with due diligence to attract beneficial relations and support financially and otherwise from different stakeholders to lift the standards of the university. I aim to apply pressure on the university to attend to student; staff and university infrastructure or resources issues timeously with the care deserved.

I believe in the upliftment of others; paying it forward; ploughing back and rising with others not alone. Mama Charlotte Maxeke taught us when she said "And if you can rise; bring someone with you".

Who is Dr Zukiswa Gonya?

Doctor Zukiswa Gonya is a determined optimistic and confident person with a positive attitude towards life; an extrovert with a great character and maintains a good reputation wherever she goes.

I am blessed to live my dream because I grew up dreaming of being a doctor; motivated by my family and teachers from primary to high school. They always believed in me. I have always been an academic achiever and occupied position one, two or three most of the time, then got certificates for maths; physical science and biology subject excellence in high school.

I served in leadership roles from a young age in primary and high school as a class Representative and then later school prefect with an academic scroll on my blazer. Leadership followed me even in university. I was on the house committee at the residences leading the debate society and ladies' soccer and was elected as the group Rep representative then class representative in the School of Medicine. Subsequently, I served in the Student Representative Council in the School of Medicine as chairperson then a year later as a treasurer of the SRC. I also served in different political branch executives of the progressive youth alliance.

Looking back I am not surprised that I am called into serving as a leader because a leader sacrifices and serves others and this is also what we do as doctors therefore everything is synchronized in my

life. I continue to serve in the South African Medical Association Trade Union (SAMATU) as a branch secretary in the Eastern Cape and I serve as the head of the health and wellness in the National Task Team of the Young Women's Desk of the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL YWD).

The nomination and subsequent election into the executive committee of the convocation did not come as a surprise to me because my track record at university as a student and a leader spoke for itself. I am however humbled by our convocants trusting me. I am grateful for the opportunity. I am more determined to do what is right for the benefit of the children and future leaders of South Africa. It would not be the first time to carry the flag of SMU as I have previously done so; flying it high at the BRICS conference held in SA 2017 as well as at the University of Lopez; Cuba during a political school in 2018 including on other platforms.

I am ready to utilize every skill gained; network achieved and competence acquired to the service in office as the elected member of the convocation to serve in the SMU Council.

How will your previous experience in student governance assist you in your new role of being elected Convocation member to serve on the Council of the University?

Serving as a student leader during my university years in the different political branch executives and student representatives' council has equipped me with the necessary skills of leadership; networking; communication; strategic planning and negotiation. The experience of working with influential people; top politicians and company holders in business will greatly influence the outcomes of the work I'll be doing as a convocation executive member.

The university's integrity has to be strengthened while considering and addressing issues of lack of funding accommodation and lack of employment for post-graduation students. We need to attract funding and scholarship opportunities to our university as well as support fundraising initiatives that are already existing; strengthen the culture, character and reputation of our institution to ensure competitive advantage with other institutions to be the first choice when it comes to health and natural sciences in South Africa. We cannot lose the traction gained during COVID-19 when our virology scientists were at the forefront of COVID-19 studies and strategies.

These issues need capable leadership; tried and tested character, hence I was nominated and elected into the executive of convocation to serve in the council.



SMU Convocation Pledges to assist the Institution in realising its Strategic Objectives

The SMU Executive Committee (EXCO) of Convocation held its Induction Workshop on 18 February 2023, which was followed by the Strategic Planning Session on 19 February 2023. The workshop clearly outlined the roles and responsibilities bestowed on the EXCO. In reference to the SMU Statute, the functions of the Convocation entail facilitating liaison between the University and its former students and academic employees; creating networks and canvassing support for the strategic objectives of the University and organising former students and academic employees' members of the University to facilitate representation of this constituency on appropriate governance structures.

SMU Registrar Dr Jeffery Mabelebele made a presentation on the role of Convocation in the University as determined by the Statute and Higher Education Act (101 of 1997). He highlighted the importance of engaging the convocation and alumni members for the benefit of the institution. He said, "Convocation must harness and nurture the continuities for the greater good of the University. All graduates of Medunsa, UL (Medunsa Campus) and SMU must see SMU as their home – home away from home. By engaging alumni, SMU can

continue to benefit from their skills & experience because alumni are great role models for current students and are often well-placed to offer practical support to students as they start their careers. Alumni are often in the position to engage the expertise of the institution in their professional lives. Alumni are international ambassadors - take their knowledge to their hometowns and countries and into their professional & social networks".

Vice-Chancellor Prof Peter Mbatia envision transforming SMU into a world-class university. He said there is no universal recipe or magic formula for making a world-class university. He further indicated that national contexts and institutional models vary widely. "There has to be a deliberate intent and purpose from an institution to grow into a world-class university. The highest-ranked universities are the ones that make significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge through research, teaching with the most innovative curricula and pedagogical methods under the most conducive circumstances, making research an integral component of undergraduate teaching, and produce graduates who stand out because of their success in intensely competitive arenas during their education and (more importantly) after

graduation. Change management towards achieving this goal is key to a successful transformation," Prof Mbatl informed the SMU EXCO Convocation.

An appeal was also made to the EXCO of Convocation to assist the University in raising funds to alleviate the historical student debts.

The EXCO of Convocation highlighted that it plans to commence with a massive recruitment and fundraising drive on behalf of the University to reduce student historical debts. "The induction and strategic planning were a success, we were able to discuss quite several issues central to the growth of SMU. We are grateful to the Vice Chancellor Prof Peter Mbatl and Registrar Dr Jeffery Mabelebele who graced the gathering to give a presentation on the developmental plans of the University. The EXCO of Convocation drafted a

document primarily on the objectives of the Convocation and we had engaged the University strategic plan document presented by the Vice-Chancellor. A joint complementary relationship between Convocation and University governance structures was emphasized for the greater good of SMU. Lastly, Fundraising plans were discussed and finalized," alluded Mr Japhtha Phala, President of SMU Convocation.

The mandate for the EXCO of Convocation's four-year term of office includes and is not limited to them developing a Convocation Annual Work-plan, the establishment of discipline/profession-based structures and chapters to drive the agenda of the Convocation and mobile members to support the Convocation and establish concrete linkages with the Alumni Association to develop and implement a shared agenda.



SMU Alumnus

Launched Online Medical Services

SMU Alumnus Dr Katekani Khosa launched Dr Khosa Online Medical Services in February 2023. It is a groundbreaking service popularly known as telehealth that enables patients to consult with their healthcare practitioners from any location, across the country, eliminating the need for strenuous travel arrangements. The service was initially introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, as it was no longer possible for doctors to consult with patients in person as they would have normally done. SMU Alumni Newsletter Reporter

had an interview session with Dr Khosa to get insight into this cutting-edge invention.

Congratulations on endorsing the telehealth concept & establishing the Dr Khosa Online Medical Services. In brief, what is telehealth all about?

Telehealth is about connecting people through digital means. That means a patient no longer needs to visit a medical practitioner's consultation place but can consult in the comfort of

continues to page 31...

their own home or office and then have their prescription delivered to their doorstep without having to leave their work or responsibilities.

Is telehealth still relevant post-COVID-19 pandemic strict protocols?

Telehealth is still relevant post-COVID-19; if there is one thing that I have learned is that not every consultation requires physical contact with a doctor, take for instance a woman who wishes to have a repeat prescription of her contraceptive medication which can be done through the telephone.

During the physical consultation, some patients require a physical examination, what replaces examination during the telehealth consultation?

Telehealth is not meant to replace the traditional physical examination by a doctor but to ease the burden of having many patients in a medical practitioner's consultation place who can easily be treated from home.

What are the telehealth cost implications in terms of consultation fees?

The costs vary from one medical aid to the other, just like traditional consultation where we still take into consideration the elderly and the unemployed. Generally, telehealth is much cheaper compared to a physical consultation.

What challenges did you experience during the implementation of telehealth at your practice?

Financial challenges when building the platform. The other challenge was having to get the message out there about what we do, explaining what telehealth means and if it is covered by medical aid schemes or not.

What are your short and long-term goals in your medical career?

Short term: Building a digital platform that works. Long-term: Building a hospital where doctors are welcome not because of their skin colour but of the contributions that they make to society. Hospitals that are accessible to the greater majority of our people and affordable as well.

What motivated you to become a Medical Doctor?

From childhood growing up in Bonn village (Tzaneen) you hardly ever heard of anyone who was a medical doctor. I think in my village we only had Dr Christopher Mushwana and this motivated me to work hard to add to this number so we could help our people who were travelling long distances to seek medical attention though the conditions have improved now, but we still need more medical practitioners who are dedicated to the rural areas.

What prompted your interest in Military Health Service?

School exhibitions in the village where soldiers would come to the village and tell us about the different departments that are within the defence force and I loved it from then. What motivated me a lot was a state funeral of about four soldiers in my village who died in a car accident I had never seen so many soldiers in my life marching in my village and I just loved the dignity with which soldiers were treating their people and to this day people are still talking about that funeral in my village after so many years. And my love for medicine prompted me to join the health side of the military.

Why did you decide to acquire your MBChB qualification from SMU?

SMU being a predominantly black institution was the only university that I applied to because I knew that I wouldn't sleep hungry I was also told by my friends who were already there, that at SMU no one gets financially excluded, so I looked at it as an institution of choice given where I was coming from.



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SMU Alumni e-Newsletter

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

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