



FOCUS on SMU

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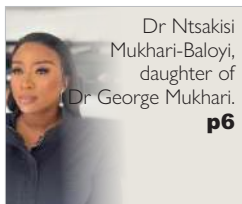
Over 2.2 million raised at the SMU Convocation

Fundraising Gala Dinner

OPEN DAY 2024

*SMU celebrates
the graduating
class of 2023*

CEO of Dr George Mukhari Academic
Hospital (DGMAH) and SMU Alumnus -
Dr Fhatuwani Mbara



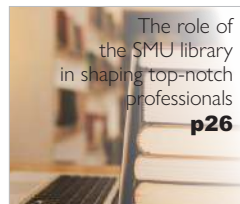
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From a village boy to the boardroom of the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMAH) - the story of **Dr Fhatuwani Godfrey Mbara**

As Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) commemorates its 10-years anniversary, it also gives recognition to the giants on whose shoulders it stands.

**Dr Fhatuwani Godfrey Mbara,
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**

of the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMAH), University of Limpopo (UL) - Medunsa campus Alumnus and family man, shared his life journey from the village to the boardroom.

Dr Mbara grew up in Venda, at a village called Ha-Budeli where he lived with his parents, brother and sister. When his father stopped working in 1985, his mother had to step in as the breadwinner. Since she had no qualifications, she managed to raise three kids with a salary of R400 per month earned from domestic piece jobs. Hence, his deep appreciation of his mother's commitment and efforts to care for his family, regardless of challenging circumstances.

Today, Dr Mbara is not only the CEO of DGMAH but a qualified medical doctor who completed his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) at SMU, the then UL-Medunsa campus. His elder brother Humani Mbara is now a principal specialist in climato-logy at the City of Joburg and his sister Edzisani Mbara is a successful businessperson who studied hospitality management and project management. The siblings' achievements were inspired by their parents' support and unconditional love.

In his message to SMU stakeholders, Dr Mbara said "I would like to appreciate being allowed to acquire my first degree at SMU, which has moulded me to become what I am today. I would not have acquired the postgraduate and other qualifications that I have earned had it not been for SMU's leadership. As the university celebrates its 10 years anniversary, I appreciate and wish SMU many more successful years. Produce more great leaders and more healthcare professionals because there will never be a point where there is no need for this kind of service".

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Editorial Team

Dr Lusani Rabelani Netshitomboni
Editor in Chief

Dineo Motshegare
Graphic Designer

Tumelo Moila
Writer

Relebogile Mabusela
Writer

Tsireledzo Mandane
Writer

CONTACT US

E-mail: lusani.netshitomboni@smu.ac.za
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
Molotlegi Road | Ga-Rankuwa | Pretoria 0204

Dr. Mbara provided more insights into his academic and leadership journey in his conversation with Focus on SMU.

What motivated you to apply and enrol at SMU?

During those days, it was well known that if you come from a rural area like Venda, you will struggle if you go to the University of the Witwatersrand or the University of Cape Town, where finances matter. I had to weigh my choices very well with the ultimate goal of being a doctor. I asked myself this question; where will I train and complete my studies with no hassle and still be a qualified doctor who is very competent? Then I choose SMU. Indeed, when I applied, I got accepted and when I arrived at the university, I was awarded the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursary.

I only had R5000, and at that stage registration was less than R4800. The research that I had done, was proper because I was assisted by my brother and former teacher Mr. John Philip whose son John Philip Junior was specializing in general surgery and had to move from Wits to complete his studies at SMU. His son said to me, please go to SMU because you will complete it on record time. With all these well-known constraints, especially the financials, there you will succeed. I thereafter received a bursary from the Limpopo government, which enabled me to complete my studies with no financial hassles.

As a child, did you ever think you would become a medical practitioner?

I always wanted to be a lawyer. When I was in Standard 6 and 7 (now Grade 8 and 9), I used to go to the Thohoyandou District Court and the regional courts. I would go there to sit and listen as I was always fascinated by the manner in which the lawyers, judges and magistrates expressed themselves in English.

So, I would go home and try to imitate them. My performance at Tshilala Secondary School situated was very impressive. The teachers had to fight for me because when I got to standard 8 (grade 10), I had to choose between maths and science, accounting, or history. The maths and science teachers were very vocal. So, they influenced my decision to go on to the maths and science stream.

On the home front, my brother started to tell me that I am going to be a great doctor because he believed that I am very disciplined and dedicated, and that I do not talk too much. In his mind, doctors do not make a lot of noise; they work quietly. From that point onwards, even during school drama projects, I took the role of a doctor. Further encouragement came from Mr. Philip and his son. For some reason, the belief that people had in me, also motivated me to aspire to become a doctor. I did not have a second option, but I was forced to complete those forms. On my

application form, the only option I had was medicine; nothing more.

Kindly take us through your journey as a student

It was quite a journey because I did not want to drop out. There was one uncle of mine who dropped out of medicine and another one who completed medicine at the University of Natal. When I came to this university, I did not want to drop out because the surname was already there. I became a very disciplined, a resolute student not focusing on anything else except my books. I never even used to play sports. The first and second years were all about my books. I started playing soccer in my third year, but when I got through fourth and fifth year, I stopped playing and started coaching a team called Elshadai FC of the Student Christian Fellowship (SCF).

The professors that I am working with now, taught me as a student. They did not know me then because I was not known for anything. I made sure that I did not extremely participate in lecture room discussions or during ward rounds even when I knew the answers. I would not show high confidence in answering as well. They would just see a student who is trying his level best. That is why many are surprised that this average student now comes back as a leader. How did this happen? Because there were leaders during my time, and I did not

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contest for any leadership position. Dr Mazibuko, the Head of the Department of Psychiatry knew me then because I was inspired to also venture into that field of psychiatry. I was doing very well in psychiatry. I even scored a distinction when I graduated because I wanted to come back. I had to impress him to the point that he knew me. So even when I got back, he knew that this was the man I taught.

What kind of values did SMU instil in you that you still uphold to this day?

You cannot learn new tricks now when you are old. At that time, coming from a public school at village, to a university, SMU moulded me. To me, this is a university of life. Therefore, whatever you see in me as a leader, comes from the ethos that I got to learn whilst I was in this university. In particular, I said jokingly to Dr Mashamba, Head of the Department: of Obstetrics and Gynaecology that, the very same way you were strict to us, where you will come at 02:00 in the morning just to make sure that we are not asleep and are working, it is the very same principles that I am also implementing. It is just that I am doing that at Management level. My phone is never off, the very same way yours is never off when you are called for the patients. So, I also do the same. So, it is just the same principles and ethos that the professors instilled in me which I adopted in my new role.

How does it feel to be in charge of the hospital that shaped your medical career through clinical training as a student?

I am immensely proud because when I arrived here, I never saw myself back here to lead. I always saw myself going out there as a doctor and working but to come back to lead is the journey that life has shaped me towards. I never stopped studying, and even now I am still busy with my articles for my PhD. I am greatly confident that working together with Professor Peter Mbatlana SMU, Vice-Chancellor, and the entire team will take SMU and DGMAH to a higher pedestal because I understand the philosophy of the leaders that are there. Prof Mbatlana was at the University of Venda (Univen), and I got my master's from Univen and even did a PhD there. So, I understand his legacy and how he works which is why we probably have a common understanding of the type of collaboration that the two institutions require.

What is your overall philosophy for leading the hospital?

I believe in leading from the front and also going back to see if people have learned a few things whilst I was in front. Then go back and observe just like a shepherd herding sheep. I have principles that are guided by the handbook of Senior Management Services (SMS) and the principles outlined there, I cannot go away from them. So, I am forced to align my principles with those. Every day when I come to this place, I recite those principles of the SMSs and then come up with my way of implementing them because the environment here is quite dynamic. I think this is the most peculiar academic institution as compared to the other three. So based on that dynamism, I am forced to lead these people in a way that they will find it easy to implement what is expected.

How does your leadership style align with DGMAH's Mission, Vision, and Values?

Because I spent most of my clinical years in this hospital, I was much more aligned with the vision whilst I was a student. I went away and came back as the CEO, then realized that what leadership was back then and what it is now, there is a lot that needs to be achieved. This includes improved medical technology, human personnel taking into consideration the mushrooming of informal settlements, and the expansion of townships around the hospital. The plans must talk to what is happening on the ground.

What changes would you implement during your time in charge of the hospital?

We spend most of our time here as employees of Gauteng Health and we need to enjoy our work. We need to be happy when we walk around DGMAH. The staff attitude is one aspect that is at the centre of how one needs to improve the services here. It is true that if you serve with a smile, even if the patients do not get the best medication, they will always remember that they were treated with a smile. We need to improve our infrastructure.

During my tenure, I would like to spearhead the discussions of us getting a new hospital be it tertiary or academic. It needs to relieve the pressure here at DGMAH because we are on the outskirts of Pretoria, and we do not have a regional or tertiary hospital. DGMAH then serves as regional, tertiary, and central all at once. We have just increased the bed capacity during the Alternative Building Technologies (ABT) structure opening. The look and feel of DGMAH needs to improve concerning the cleanliness of the hospital, making sure that our patients do not get returned home without getting proper services, and ensuring that medicines are readily available at all material times. Because this is an academic hospital, we need to produce more of our medical specialists than all other healthcare professionals.

What healthcare partnerships would you like to foster to enhance the hospital's strategic operations?

By being called an academic hospital, there has to be some training that is being provided so we are linked to SMU. When I arrived here, within two weeks I was called for a meeting with the Vice Chancellor to introduce myself and share a few ideas with him. As a young leader, I am very enthusiastic about the work of the university because I am also a scholar who is still furthering his studies. I understand that the development of an institution can only be on par if you improve your research output and SMU has more of those, leading in terms of data governance and producing this data to the researchers who are on the other side. We have a lot of data in this institution and that data talks to the community around here. If we do more research and publish it, then we can attract international investors, even local investors. This will assist in terms of producing more graduates and specialists.

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In terms of the partnerships, there is the university, then there are local businesses that play a critical role like the BMWs at Roslyn and Sibanye Still Water. These are the stakeholders who have shown interest in improving the infrastructure of DGMAH.

Describe your process for integrating new healthcare trends into DGMAH's strategic vision.

In terms of health technology, we cannot shy away from that. Other hospitals have moved quite a bit due to how their funding model has been and the infrastructure that they have inherited. For us we are kind of starting from the beginning. For example, the project of the bunkers or radiation oncology services. You would find that Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital and Steve Biko Academic Hospital are well advanced in those services. We and Baragwanath Hospital are still making strides into those spaces. These two institutions are the biggest hospitals located in townships with Baragwanath sitting at 3000 bed capacity and DGMAH around 1900 since opening the ABT.

In terms of moving with speed to enhance health technology, there needs to be more investments from national and provincial government to improve the infrastructure of our facility. These technologies go a long way in terms of how SMU is improving the curriculum that they are offering through teaching and training. During my time, it was only health care sciences and medicine. Now I understand that the scope is quite big and that is why it is important to have those resources to improve DGMAH's health technology. All our professors need to be taught about these new strategies that national and provincial leadership is putting forward regarding technology.

As the CEO, how do you weigh DGMAH's financial goals with its patient care priorities?

Fiscal management is key in terms of decision-making. You can be overly ambitious to say you want to erect a new accident and emergency building, then end up being stopped by the finances. Most of our budget goes towards the compensation of employees. With the previous arrangements that were made for the maintenance budget, we did not achieve much. There was an implementing agent called the Department of Infrastructure and Development which went through their processes of implementing all our plans but found that the work provided for some time has not been to our satisfaction, not only at DGMAH but at Gauteng Health.

Recently, a decision has been taken that the DDG infrastructure and health is the accounting officer of Infrastructure and the budget. We can align our yearly plans in terms of project management and accurately measure the cost of the project and see work being done to our satisfaction.

As the healthcare industry continually faces staffing shortages, what measures would you take to improve recruitment and retention of staff?

At DGMAH we need a different feel and approach from our principals, the MEC and HOD. The approach of looking at the

reclassification of DGMAH in terms of rural allowance is an incentive that will keep on motivating the current staff that we have to remain and also to attract new ones.

In terms of getting more staff members, it is all about the new structure that we have proposed to be approved. We have worked around the numbers and demographics of what has changed in terms of population growth, the expansion of services that we are rendering, and the reality of what is supposed to be on the ground. If we get that structure approved, at least we will be able to address the challenges of staff capacity.

What are you most proud of as a leader and why?


I am proud of knowing what I wanted much earlier, so I did not waste time. I wanted to be in leadership and I took that decision. At the age of 37, I am leading the second biggest hospital in Southern Africa. So that talks to decision-making. I want to improve this institution so that it achieves greatness. During the end of my tenure, I need to look back and say whatever I have achieved in five years. After that, I will decide if I still want to continue being CEO or to pursue other interests.

What do you stand for as a leader?

I stand for principled decisions. As long as the decision that you make has fundamental premises that talk to the core function of the business, mainly saving lives and rendering quality health care service. If you are going to chase me away for making the right decision to save lives and provide quality health care to patients, it means that you and I are not aligned. Before I got appointed, there had to be that alignment in this current administration. The MEC is a continually active leader, and she is very decisive in terms of what she wants for the department. Hence, I found it fit for me to contest to be in this space. I am a principled leader, who is not shy and afraid of making principled decisions. I cannot be persuaded to take decisions are not based on principles.

As an SMU alumnus, what would you say to a student who is academically struggling to complete their studies?

What is required is for one not to lose sight of the reason they came to the university because there are a lot of wonderful things that happen here. You get the independence that you probably never had and all the freedom of going wherever you want where nobody will police you. You have to act in a responsible manner. Repay the trust given to you by your parents and those who brought you to school.

If you find yourself struggling, you need to self-introspect. Where have you lost it and why others are succeeding and not you? Then you will realize that maybe most of your time is shared in other things and extraordinarily little time is left for you to focus on your studies. Then just realign that and A luta continua. Proceed with dedication and know that to be accepted at the university means that you are capable because the space is extremely limited; you will make it. 

Dr Ntsakisi Mukhari-Baloyi follows on the footsteps of Dr George Mukhari



Clinical Manager, Dr Ntsakisi Mukhari-Baloyi, daughter of Dr George Mukhari after whom Ga-Rankuwa Hospital was renamed, ploughs back into the community her late father immensely served. Dr Ntsakisi Mukhari-Baloyi is currently the acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the SMU Oral Health Centre (OHC), an institution that contributed significantly to her career in dentistry.

The mother of 12-year-old twins is not only the Acting CEO but also a qualified dentist by profession. She completed her Bachelor of Dentistry and Advanced Diploma in Community Dentistry at the University of Limpopo (UL) – Medunsa campus. She acquired her Master of Dental Science in Community Dentistry at SMU and then graduated with a Master of Dentistry in Community Dentistry at the University of Pretoria.

“Given my aspiration to advance in my career path, I worked my way through post-graduate studies,” she said. Dr Mukhari-Baloyi grew up wanting to become a medical doctor, just like her father. She started considering areas of speciality in paediatrics and forensic pathology during her years in high school. After the tragic loss of her father, she abandoned that dream for some time, considering the grief that she associated with being a medical doctor. Her mother, a stalwart in her own right, managed to redirect her to the path she deserted. “Based on my undergraduate academic performance, I had three areas of interest, namely, Maxillofacial and Oral Surgery, Oral Pathology, and Community Dentistry. It was only during my community service year that I decided to specialize in Community Dentistry. My passion to be an advocate for the promotion of equitable quality oral health services was ignited by my observations of the plight of our community members with regard to accessing basic oral health care”, she explained.



As Acting CEO of SMUOHC, Dr Mukhari-Baloyi's core responsibility is to oversee service rendering and clinical training processes within the facility, provision of strategic leadership, program and project management, fiscal management, change management, people management, and empowerment. Her leadership is guided by key competencies which include knowing relevant legislations such as the National Health Act, Public Finance Management Act, Public Service Act, and other related legislations. She is well positioned to inform the National Oral Health policy by actively participating in the strategic planning forums for public oral health.

Dr Mukhari-Baloyi describes herself as a God-fearing woman, who is humble, compassionate, and ambitious. She stands firmly on respecting boundaries and engages respectfully with people, regardless of their age, social stature, or designation. She further emphasised that as a leader, ethical conduct is

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paramount because it encompasses integrity, transparency, accountability, honesty, and commitment.

“I believe in leadership that can exist in reversed roles. Even though as a leader you are entrusted to lead, reversing roles strikes the perfect balance between servant and participative leadership. This gives an organization the zeal to work together towards achieving common goals. Great leaders embrace the notion that to lead, you have to be able to follow,” she shared.

Dr Mukhari-Baloyi emphasized that her leadership style aligns with SMUOHC's values and mission because she promotes the well-being and development of stakeholders in all aspects of academia and service rendering, placing emphasis on patient-centeredness. She added that the values and mission of SMUOHC also enhance her drive to promote high impact in research and, a high standard of teaching and training which translates to the provision of quality oral health care. “Promoting a culture of research within the facility by both staff and students will ensure evidence-based practice. Together we can take the responsibility of creating a conducive work environment that accommodates both staff and students, which will have a positive influence on the willingness to participate in innovative transformation which will be beneficial to the communities that we serve,” she further stated.

Dr Mukhari-Baloyi said overseeing an institution that shaped her career through clinical training is a great honour and a mammoth responsibility she does not take lightly. She had the privilege of being at SMUOHC as an undergraduate student to a seat in its executive management.

“This institution has contributed towards the humility I serve and lead with. It gave me a broader horizon to appreciate and mitigate the challenges that exist at various levels of the institution. I aim to have a positive impact on the growth and transformation of the facility, to create an environment that will allow me to be an efficient Clinical Manager once the CEO post gets filled, but to a greater extent afford staff and students the same opportunity,” articulated Dr Mukhari-Baloyi.

As an SMU alumni her message to students is that “Never be deterred by a setback such as academic failure. If anything, it can only help you enhance your competency. Never be afraid to ask your peers for assistance. You might find your grasp of concepts better when shared among peers. As a Black child, it is an underrated blessing to be allowed to indulge in higher education, given this opportunity, do not misuse it or take it for granted”. 

Global Horizons: Internationalisation and its Impact at SMU



Internationalisation in the context of higher education institutions is multifaceted. Known as comprehensive internationalisation, it encompasses various dimensions that extend beyond mere recruitment of international students' academic exchange or international travel. It involves the development and implementation of strategies that foster global engagement across various aspects of an institution. These include internationalisation of the curriculum, where modules are designed to incorporate global perspectives and cross-cultural understanding, thus enhancing the educational experience for students. Additionally, internationalisation involves research collaboration and partnerships with institutions worldwide, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and innovation on a global scale. Furthermore, it encompasses cultural exchange and initiatives aimed at creating an inclusive and diverse campus environment. Thus, internationalisation is a complex and interconnected process that touches upon cultural, academic, and institutional aspects, contributing to the holistic development of the institution and its stakeholders.

A substantial element of comprehensive internationalisation is international partnerships and collaborations. These partnerships and collaborations are one of the cornerstones of internationalisation on a

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university campus. Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) regards having a diverse number of global partners as incredibly important in raising its institutional reputation and profile, providing research opportunities for academics and most importantly enabling the internationalisation of the curriculum of the programmes. Furthermore, SMU considers its strategic international partnerships as a highly effective vehicle that can significantly promote greater staff and student mobility for international exposure, attract a more diverse student body, impact curriculum development and collaborative teaching and learning programmes, and grow research networks.

However, the initiation and finalisation of any global partnership or collaboration cannot occur in a vacuum. It is a collaborative effort between various stakeholders. At SMU, the Internationalisation Directorate collaborates with the relevant School, Department or Academic to ensure that fit-for-purpose agreements are entered into. The SMU Research and Innovation Directorate focuses on pure research-related agreements. Importantly, SMU also adheres to the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education to

determine a standardised guidance framework for SMU about international partnerships. The Policy Framework advocates that South African universities should first engage with SADC, African institutions, BRICS institutions and then the rest of the world.

SMU's dedicated Internationalisation Directorate was established in 2022. Before this, internationalisation was managed as part of the university's advancement portfolio. The University now has its first Internationalisation Strategy, which guides internationalisation on campus. SMU's partnerships and collaborations are evaluated against university strategic objectives to determine if it is fit-for-purpose and mutually beneficial. Due to a more focused approach, internationalisation endeavours have grown in leaps and bounds and Schools are embracing the decentralized management of internationalisation by identifying champions in Schools to keep partnerships active. As a proudly African university, SMU has embraced partnerships and collaborations with African institutions as well as welcoming international students from other African countries, since its inception. 

SMU celebrates the graduating class of 2023



Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) hosted its annual graduation ceremonies to celebrate its newest generation of healthcare professionals. The ceremonies were held over three days, from the 22-24, of May 2024 at the university Sports Complex.

Graduations in their nature serve as a culmination of years of hard work, dedication, and perseverance. These graduates will enter the workforce at a critical time, and their skills and knowledge will be instrumental in strengthening South Africa's healthcare system and in science and technology.

This year's graduation ceremonies, were a momentous occasion, with graduates from all five of SMU's Schools

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being honoured for their achievements. SMU Schools are comprised of the School of Medicine, School of Science and Technology (SST), School of Pharmacy (SOP), School of Health Care Sciences (SHCS) and the School of Dentistry (SOD). The University awarded higher certificates and conferred bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees to a total of 1324 qualifiers. The qualifications awarded included 142 honours degrees, 215 master's degrees and 13 doctoral degrees. The SHCS and SOD were the first to celebrate their graduates on the opening day.

The SMU Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Research, Professor Tandi Matsha-Erasmus welcomed and congratulated all the graduates. She emphasised that the 2024 graduation ceremony is an indication that the university is reasserting its role in the advancement of scholarship and research. She indicated that statistics show that the university is contributing significantly to the skills development needs and broader knowledge projects of South Africa and SADC.

"I am pleased to inform you that the university will be graduating a total of 84 cum laude candidates and the highest coming from the SOM with 51 graduates. It is also pleasing to note that the youngest graduate for this season is 19 years old and will be graduating with a Bachelor of Oral Hygiene (BOH) from the SOD. The eldest graduate for this season is 71 years old and will be graduating with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from the SHCS," alluded DVC.

She further indicated that Prof Mbat's prioritisation of the academic project since he assumed office is beginning to bear fruits for the university and that his ability to marshal diverse stakeholders to a common vision remains an inspiration to them all.

"Our nation, the continent and the world depend on this university for skills and knowledge. We call upon all the progressive forces inside and outside the university to support this university in its endeavours to realise this common vision. The future is bright for SMU, and more is still to come," says the SOD Acting Dean Professor Mawela.

The youngest graduate for this season was a 19-year-old female who graduated with a Bachelor of Oral Hygiene from the SOD, and the eldest graduate was 71 years old and graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health in SHCS.






Dr Maryke Kahts raising the flag in Radiopharmacy

I have been permanently employed as a lecturer, and the MPharm in Radiopharmacy course coordinator, within the Pharmaceutical Sciences Department of the School of Pharmacy since 2019. I completed my BPharm degree at the North-West University in Potchefstroom, after which I did an academic internship and MSc (Med) Radiopharmacy degree at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (University of Limpopo, Medunsa Campus, at that time) and officially obtained my PhD in Radiopharmacy from SMU on 24 May 2024.

Radiopharmacy is a specialization of Pharmacy, which makes Nuclear Medicine possible. A radiopharmacist is responsible for the synthesis and preparation of safe, high-quality radiopharmaceuticals (radioactive substances) that are administered to patients for the diagnosis or detection of disease via gamma ray detection through a Nuclear Medicine scan, or for the specific treatment of certain diseases via the emission of particles that ablate tissue. The role of Nuclear Medicine is most prominent in cancer, but it is also used in various other diseases, such as infection/inflammatory diseases, heart disease, thyroid pathology, pulmonary embolism, hepatobiliary disease and renal disease. Nuclear Medicine and Radiopharmacy are rapidly evolving fields of specialization in South Africa, to such an extent that South Africa has been recognized globally in the past few years as a top-contributing country in the Nuclear Medicine field. Furthermore, SMU is the only institution in the whole of Africa that offers an English-medium professional MPharm in Radiopharmacy programme, which has resulted in the hosting of international fellows sponsored by the International Atomic Energy Agency in the MPharm in Radiopharmacy programme at SMU since 2020.

In my PhD research project, I optimized a method to radiolabel various blood cells with a relatively long-lived radioisotope, zirconium-89 (half-life of 3.3 days) for the in vivo, noninvasive tracking of these radiolabelled cells to see where they localize in the body. This research makes it possible to detect deep-seated infections (in the case of ^{89}Zr -labelled white blood cells), to detect small, continuous intestinal bleeds (in the case of ^{89}Zr -labelled red blood cells), and to determine whether stem cells migrate to the organ of interest after stem cell transplantation therapy (in the case of ^{89}Zr -labelled hematopoietic and mesenchymal stem cells). This original work contributes greatly to the body of knowledge regarding radiolabelling of blood elements with ^{89}Zr and paves the way for further work on imaging cell trafficking in vivo. Through the publications and conference proceedings the work also raises the status of SMU in the area of Radiopharmacy.

My PhD journey was long and extremely challenging, but also presented me with invaluable skills and opportunities. A large part of my research was done in collaboration with a team based at the Memorial Sloane Kettering Hospital, New York, USA, and I also worked closely with local experts based at the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation (Necsa) and the Nuclear Medicine Research Infrastructure (NuMeRI). My research also contributed to my acceptance to and attendance of a training course on radiosynthesis procedures at the Asan Medical Center in Seoul, South Korea, fully sponsored by the World Council on Isotopes and the Korean Atomic Energy Research Institute, which offered further opportunity for international collaboration.

I am proud to say that I am one of only a handful of qualified, practicing radiopharmacists in South Africa holding PhD degrees in Radiopharmacy. 



Towards becoming a Medical Scientist with Koketso Letsholo



While SMU celebrates its 10 years of academic excellence, it continues to produce globally competitive graduates. Ms Koketso Bella Letsholo is one of the students who recently graduated from SMU and was awarded with a Master of Science (MSc) in Virology by SMU's School of Medicine. Her MSc research title is Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus Type 2 among incarcerated persons during the 2020 – 2021 pandemic in Gauteng, South Africa. The 25-year-old is currently part of the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) Medical Scientist training programme for the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) accreditation at Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital in SMU's virology laboratory.

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She emphasised that her research was the first study to get recognition for the assessment of the genetic diversity of SARS-CoV-2 in South African prisons. Her research found that the dominating variant in a prison's population was Beta VOC, followed by Delta VOC and Omicron VOC.



“This study significantly advances virology's understanding of the nature of circulating SARS-CoV-2 mutations among South African inmates. Future work will include evaluating other preventative measures such as moving activities outdoors or limiting interaction between cells and yards within prisons,” informed Koketso.

The aspiring Medical Scientist started studying at SMU in 2016 for a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Life Sciences. Upon completion of her undergraduate degree, she decided to register for an Honours degree in Virology which she completed in 2019. She also indicated that she plans to finally register for a PhD in either Virology, Public Health, Pharmacology, or Forensic Sciences “I have always wanted to become a Medical Scientist and knew that I must end up in research to contribute to the body of knowledge. On the contrary, I did not know that research niche would be Medical Virology,” shared Koketso enthusiastically.


“When I first heard about SMU it was still called Medunsa. At that stage I was in Grade 9 at Dilopye Middle School. It sounded like a place where my dream of becoming a Medical Scientist would come true. Upon doing my research about the university and the courses it offered, I then developed an interest in BSc Life Sciences and told myself that I wanted to try my luck and apply. Little did I know that I would be a 3-time graduate at the same institution,” explained Koketso.

Apart from her SMU qualifications, the God-fearing young lady was awarded a Pathology, Research and Development Congress certificate from PathReD in 2021, a TaqPath Covid-19 Combo Kit and Advanced Workflow Kit certificate from ThermoFisher Scientific in 2021, and a Nucleic Acid Extraction on the MDISP-960 platform certificate from MGI Tech in 2021. She also had the opportunity to work at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital during the Coronavirus pandemic, where she received lots of training at the NHLS labs from companies such as Roche, MGI Tech, and Abbott, all thanks to the SMU virology department.

She described her journey with SMU as pleasant and fruitful. SMU taught Koketso to work hard and be versatile, punctual, and goal oriented. She said SMU's environment on its own created a 'nothing is impossible' type of atmosphere. She further indicated that SMU opened her up to the most fulfilling part of her life which is mentorship within the Centre for University Teaching and Learning (CUTL). She continued to say that the CUTL mentorship programme redefined what self-love and having a purpose looked like. She believes that her passion for motivational speaking and charity work was sharpened through the mentorship programme.

Koketso comes from a place called Dilopye in Hammanskraal, an area known for polluted water which had caused a cholera outbreak. She is a notable example of what it means to conquer challenges and achieve aspirations regardless of where one comes from. Her parents, Eva and Ratanang Letsholo, and brother Obusang Letsholo are the backbones of her achievements. “Even on my darkest saddest days, they were able to reassure and encourage me that I can still do it,” expressed Koketso.

“To those who feel academically overwhelmed, continue to fight to the best of your ability, give it your all, and never give up because if you give up, no one will believe that you ever tried. Failure is an opportunity to try again and better yourself with experience. We are all stars, and it is just a matter of time until every one of our flowers blossoms, concluded Koketso.

Outside of SMU, Koketso is the Secretary of Hans Kekana High School Alumni, a member of Godswill Charity Ministry, the youth Chairperson of International Christian Fellowship in Mashimong Church, and the Marketing Head of a youth movement called LAYIM in Hammanskraal. 



From Winterveldt to an SMU Maths lecturer - a reflection on Mr Professor Ndlovu's academic journey



Surviving peer pressure in a crime-ridden Winterveldt township was difficult for Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Mathematics Part-Time Junior Lecturer, Mr Professor Ndlovu, who beat the odds through resilience, determination, and a dedicated support system from his parents. Ndlovu's visionary mindset steered him to resist negative influences and thrive despite challenging circumstances.

"The hunger to change my impoverished background positively pushed me to develop clear goals and values, build assertiveness and communication skills, seek positive role models, engage in positive activities, stay aware of potential risks, and seek help when needed," recalls Ndlovu, who teaches first-year and honours students.

He saw Mathematics as a solution to all his problems and fell in love with it in Grade 7. He started teaching his peers when he was in Grade 10, at Tswaing Secondary School, Winterveldt.

"I enjoyed explaining Mathematics to learners. I remember when I was in Grade 12, my Mathematics teacher would assign me to teach lower grades, and I would be so excited about that because I love sharing what I know. Today, I am a mathematician, and I have always wanted to change the mindset of students regarding mathematics. Most students believe that mathematics is a difficult subject, so teaching them allows me to change their mindset," explains Ndlovu the eldest brother among his siblings, and the first one from his family to enrol at the university.

As a student and graduate at SMU, since 2016 to date, Ndlovu has received cum laude accolades for his Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Mathematics (2019) and BSc (Honours) in Mathematics (2021) studies, obtaining 100% marks in the Topology module. Additionally, he received a mark of 96% in his Master of Science (MSc) in Mathematics (2024) qualification.

At some point, a lack of funding threatened his studies. He soldiered on until his prayers were answered. "The only challenge that I had was during my first year where I did not have funding for my studies. As a result, I did not stay at the student residence. So, I was travelling from Winterveldt to SMU using either a taxi, bus, or train. There were times where I could not attend practicals if I did not have money for a taxi fare. It was really difficult for me, but I did not take that as an excuse. I would spend my time studying inside the bus when I was going home and also when I was coming to campus," he reminisces.

His funding fortunes changed when NSFAS started funding him, subsequently affording him an off-campus residence. "I was staying at South Point student residence. The memories

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that I would not forget are that I was sharing the room with my classmate, who was a diligent worker. So, we would motivate each other to study. What I will never forget is that during our final year Gala Dinner, we received all the merit awards for the BSc (Mathematical Science) degree. He received the award for Computer Science, and I received the one for Mathematics and Statistics. We pasted them on our room door the night we received them as part of our celebration,” said Ndlovu.

It is truly a full-circle moment for Ndlovu to be lecturing at his alma mater. As a student, SMU provided him with not only a solid foundation in mathematics but also invaluable experiences and opportunities that guide his academic journey. Now, being able to impart knowledge and inspire the next generation of students in the same halls where he once walked as a student is both humbling and fulfilling.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to teaching and learning at the university that played such a pivotal role in shaping my career and continuing the legacy of excellence in mathematics education,” he proclaims.


As an academic, his philosophy revolves around fostering an environment of active learning, critical thinking, and mutual respect. He believes in putting students at the centre of the learning process, which involves understanding their needs, interests, and learning styles to create engaging and inclusive learning experiences. Rather than simply transferring information, he cultivates critical thinking skills in his students, encouraging them to question, analyse, and evaluate information that fosters deeper understanding and prepares them for lifelong learning. He said,

“By aligning my teaching style with strategic plans for teaching and learning, I contribute to the overarching goals of promoting student success, fostering innovation, and creating inclusive learning environments. My approach emphasises active learning, outcome-oriented assessment, innovative pedagogical practices, diversity and inclusion, and ongoing professional development, all of which are essential components of effective teaching and learning strategies”.

He further expressed his gratitude to his alma mater for shaping his academic journey. “I express my sincere gratitude for the instrumental role that SMU has played in shaping my academic and personal growth. As I reflect on my journey thus far, I am deeply appreciative of the opportunities, resources, and support that have enabled me to achieve my goals. Throughout my time at SMU, I have been consistently challenged to push beyond my limits, encouraged to explore new avenues of knowledge, and inspired to strive for excellence in all endeavours. I am especially grateful for having a leader like the Head of the Department: Mathematics and Applied Mathematics Professor Maggie Aphane, My Supervisor, and all my undergraduate and postgraduate lecturers for pushing me this far,” reflects Ndlovu.

As he embarks on the next chapter of his journey, he carries with him the invaluable lessons and experiences gained.

“I am proud to be a part of such an esteemed institution and will continue to uphold its values and ideals in all my future endeavours. Once again, thank you for your unwavering support and guidance. I am truly honoured to be a part of the SMU community and will always cherish the memories and lessons learned here,” said an appreciative Ndlovu.

Ndlovu already has three of his publications published in peer-reviewed journals. He wants to engage further in research activities and contribute to the body of knowledge in mathematics. His future career prospects encompass advancement within academia, such as progressing from a Master's to a Doctorate, Associate Professor, and ultimately, a professor, to justify his parents for naming him Professor, which is his first name as it appears in his official identity document. 



Capacity development for postgraduate students: a Department of Mathematics initiative



topological indices and neighbourhood M-Polynomials; a Mathematical model for pricing bond under the affine process; Advancing cryptocurrency market analysis and investment strategies: an integrated approach using machine learning, sentiment analysis, and factor investing amongst others.

The Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics recently hosted a postgraduate presentation session to allow its Master of Science (MSc) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students to present their research proposals and dissertations. The session highlighted the academic achievements of MSc students through presentations, providing an overview of their research proposals, findings, and academic contributions.

Topics that were addressed during presentations included the Symmetry analysis, exact solutions, and conservation laws of the generalized (3+1) dimensional Ito equation and generalized (3+1) dimensional Camassa-Holm-Kadomtsev-Petviashvili equation with power law nonlinearity; Computational analysis of complex dendrimer and graphene structures via neighbourhood multiple degree-based

As a living proof of researchers within the field of mathematics, and Applied Mathematics HOD Prof Maggie Apane encouraged the postgraduate students to complete their research projects. She stressed that whatever efforts they are making for their research projects, they must remember that they are not doing it for their supervisors because it is their journey to fulfil. She told them that they were ploughing and that the more they produced decent work, the better they would become experts in this field.

“Every time you study, remember that the supervisor is just there to guide you. It is your responsibility to ensure that you engage with your supervisors and that it is necessary to get your research project done. If there is a paper that is supposed to be published, it is your responsibility to make sure that you get the results needed. She indicated that the maths

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department currently has 4 Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) registered students for the first time since its establishment at SMU,” informed Prof Aphane.

Msc student and Part-time Lecturer Matlhatsi Ngwepe outlined the objectives and methodologies of her research project with the title Approximation of a common solution for split variational inclusion and fixed-point problems in real Banach spaces. She indicated that the niche area of her research is Optimization and Fixed-Point theory. The purpose of her research was to introduce a method that performs better than Yan Tang's method of inertial algorithm for solving split common null point problems in Banach spaces in terms of the acceleration rate and the difficulty of computation when applying it in a maths lab to run numerical examples.

“My research objective was to introduce a solution to a problem of split variational inclusion problem and fixed-point problem. This problem can be applied to signal processing and image reconstruction. Together with my supervisors want our solution to perform better when applying it to this image reconstruction and signal processing. In image reconstruction. We talk about the CCTV footage or the Magnetic Resonance Image scan so, our method will make the image clearer and come out fast compared to the other methods we studied,” explained Matlhatsi.

SMU Librarians also made presentations that informed the attendees about the services available to academics and postgraduate students, emphasizing resources and support tailored to research needs. They specified the library's offerings and tools for measuring postgraduates' research impact, where they can publish their research, and how to access the library services on and off-campus.

Maths Postgraduate Research Coordinator and Lecturer Dr Claude Moutsinga indicated that the session facilitated networking opportunities because the engagement and participation of attendees highlighted the importance of fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange within the academic community. Furthermore, the session provided an opportunity for all parties in attendance to learn more valuable insights about research and its support services.🔍



Over 2.2 million raised at the SMU Convocation Fundraising Gala Dinner



Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) hosted its inaugural and prestigious convocation fundraising and alumni awards gala dinner on Thursday 15 May 2024. The event was intended to raise funds to support students with historical debts-learning gadgets, food security, and scholarship programmes, to promote brand awareness and to give recognition to SMU Alumni through excellence awards. This event hosted several high-profile guests from various industries including professionals and academics.

In his welcoming address Mr. Japhta Phala, the Convocation president welcomed everyone and pointed out that at the beginning of each year SMU has several students who struggle to register due to historical debt. He further described a situation where students struggle to register due to outstanding fees as a catch-22 situation.

“The students want to pursue their studies, but at the same time, the university needs to get money. It is a very difficult and fragile situation. So we took a position as Convocation that we need to bring together friends of the university, and the former executives of the university, and pledge something to this initiative to ensure that students who were not able to register this year, due to financial challenges are able to register. We all know of course that globally, if you check the prosperous universities, their success and prosperity relies on the involvement of their alumni,” Phala emphasised.

The SMU Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Mbatlana, in his address, indicated that through the Harambee initiative, the University supports a vulnerable cohort of students with a monthly living allowance so that they can buy food, toiletries, and Learning Gadgets program that ensures that students have access to critical technology such as laptops, tablets, and

data, which are indispensable for the academics. “I encourage you to consider donating to this noble cause, indicating that “your support is vital in helping our students succeed, and in fostering a supportive environment where every student can have the opportunity to excel”, urged Professor Mbatlana.

In her keynote address, Dr Gwen Ramokgopa encouraged SMU alumni to financially support the university to ensure its sustainability. She acknowledged the difficulty that historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) experience with funding and encouraged corporate South Africa to financially support HDIs. She concluded by encouraging SMU as a health sciences institution to contribute towards making the National Health Insurance (NHI) a success.

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The event featured an inspiring Alumni Awards Ceremony, recognizing outstanding alumni across various categories: Young Alumni Awards, Alumni Academic and Innovation Awards, Alumni Impact Awards, Alumni Exemplary Service Awards, Alumni Governance Leadership Awards and Alumni Lifetime Achievement Awards.

AWARDS RECIPIENTS INCLUDED:

SMU Alumni Award of Leadership recipients

- Dr Magome Masike (Former North West MEC of Health and current CEO of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA))
- Dr Phophi Ramathuba (Limpopo MEC of Health)
- Dr Stanley Moloabi - Principal Officer of Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS)
- Dr Dan Mosia (Chief Commercial Officer, Current Chair of UNISA Council)
- Dr Mpho Phalatse (Former City of Johannesburg Mayor)
- Dr Bandile Masuku (Former Gauteng Health MEC)

SMU Alumni Impact Award Recipients

- Dr Mmereka Patience Ntshani
- Dr Tumishang Makweya

SMU Young Alumnus Award Recipients

- Mr. Thabo Sekwati (Bafana Bafana Team Physiotherapist)
- Dr Nthabiseng Maesela (Banyana Banyana Team Doctor)
- Dr Carl Tabane (Mamelodi Sundowns FC Team Physician)

SMU Exemplary Alumni Award Recipients

- Dr Thabo Twala
- Dr Tiny Mhinga
- Dr Solly Motlanthe

SMU Alumni Award for Academic Excellence

- Prof Zach Koto
- Prof Mashudu Tshifularo
- Prof Tshepo Gugushe
- Prof Pindile Mntla

This event marked the beginning of a stronger connection between the SMU convocation and the broader university community. It signifies a collective responsibility for the university's prosperity, with a particular focus on alumni taking ownership of its success.





OPEN DAY 2024

Clad in their school uniforms, grades 10, 11 and 12 learners from different schools across the country, converged at the SMU Sports Complex on the 9th of May 2024 to attend the annual SMU Open Day (OD). The aspiring scientists and healthcare professionals interacted with the university's representatives from different academic and non-academic departments to get insight into the course offerings, accommodation, and fees, amongst others. OD is designed to help prospective students make informed decisions about their future careers.

The OD activities included campus tours, information relating to undergraduate courses and their prospective career opportunities, opportunities to meet and talk to lecturers and course coordinators, and Financial Aid Office staff members to discuss potential funding options.

Prospective students are encouraged to apply for admission to SMU through our online application system. Closing dates for applications are as follows:

- Wednesday, 31 July 2024 for undergraduate programmes.
- Friday, 30 August 2024 for postgraduate programmes. Apply using this link: <https://www.smu.ac.za/students/apply/online>





SMU Celebrates World Intellectual Property (IP) Day


Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) commemorated World Intellectual Property (IP) Day, under the theme IP and Sustainable Development Goals: Building our Common Future with Innovation and Creativity, on Tuesday, 30 April 2024. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness about the role of IP rights in fostering innovation and creativity. IP rights provide creators and innovators with exclusive rights to their creation (intellectual property), incentivizing investment and innovation.

The commemoration was graced by guest speakers from various companies, including Ms. Portia Mavhungu, founder of PRD Logical Solutions, Phumulani Tetyana, portfolio manager and Acting Head of the Health Business Unit at the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), Ms. Paballo Masite, the Director for Funds and Incentives Management Directorate at National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO) and SMU Master of Pharmacy Student, Mr Emmanuel Kiyonga.

In her address, Ms Mavhungu indicated that her company introduced an innovation called Para-tube. The Para-tube innovation is a retrofitted seat that fits onto any standard existing wheelchair. It works together with disposal by degradable bags, and it converts into a toilet while the patient's pelvis is eased in the Wheelchair. This allows the patient to be independent and retain their dignity because many times people living in rural areas or even in old age homes that people fall off the wheelchair and they break their pelvis, and their lifespan becomes shorter.

Ms. Paballo Masite emphasized the connection between IP and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She highlighted SDGs 14, 15, 16, and 17, focusing on creating peaceful societies, fostering partnerships, protecting the environment, and achieving sustainable economic growth – all areas where innovation plays a crucial role.

Mr Phumulani Tetyana addressed the role of biomedical innovations in tackling South Africa's socio-economic challenges as outlined in the NDP Vision 2030. He emphasized collaboration between research institutions, universities, and private companies for successful innovation. He also highlighted existing challenges such as inequality, unemployment, and poverty. “The South African government, through the Department of Science and Technology (DST), supports biomedical innovations in two main sectors: medical devices and pharmaceuticals. There's a thriving medical device industry with a growing number of SMEs. These include, Cape Ray and Incisa Diagnostics” Mr Tetyana explained.

Mr Emmanuel Kiyonga, whose invention of the Raloxifene Hydrochloride Hydrate solvate drug for cancer was the first registered patent at SMU, expressed his appreciation for the event. He highlighted the importance of IP protection and urged fellow students to reach out to the SMU Transfer Technology (TTO) Office to safeguard their innovations. His dedication to innovation has been recognized through awards such as the Academy of Pharmaceutical Sciences of South Africa (APSSA) Young Scientist Award and the SMU Research Day Best Presentation. 



The role of the SMU library in shaping top-notch professionals



Academic libraries serve as hubs within educational institutions playing a pivotal role in shaping top-notch professionals across various domains. Through multifaceted contributions to education, social cohesion, technological integration and advancement, and access to current research and scholarly information resources, the SMU library and information services are, and remain a catalyst in fostering holistic growth and development among students and academics alike. The LIS provides the services as presented below:

Educational Enrichment

Over the years, the SMU LIS played a pivotal role in serving as a sanctuary for intellectual exploration, fostering a culture of learning beyond the confines of the classroom. Standing tall on the shoulders of its highly esteemed predecessors, the University of Limpopo and MEDUNSA, the SMU library offers an extensive collection of various formats of information resources, which include reference materials, print and electronic journals, electronic databases, and artefacts such as synthetic human bones, all aimed at empowering students to delve deeper into their fields of study.

Currently, the Library has more than 46000 printed and multimedia items, 50000 printed journals, 17 multidisciplinary databases, 106 e-journal subscriptions, 1000 Synthetic human bones, and 3477 e-book titles. The migration from print-based collections to online is ongoing and, is currently, it is being scaled up to meet the requirements of multimodal learning at SMU. Other than the collections offered, the SMU library provides quiet study spaces, discussion rooms and electronic learning spaces that are conducive to the academic

discourse, facilitating critical thinking and knowledge acquisition essential for professional success.

Access to Online Information Resources:

With the exponential growth of digital platforms in the last decade, the SMU library took an opportunity so that the library does not lag behind in advancing technological innovation integration within educational ecosystems. One of the most significant contributions of the SMU library lies in its provision of online research journals and databases. By offering access to a vast repository of scholarly literature, the library enables students, staff, and researchers to stay abreast with the latest developments in their respective fields.

The recent implementation of the Exlibris-Alma, the Library Management System, and the launch of the library mobile APP ensures that the SMU LIS provides seamless access to the information resources on offer. Open Athens is a single sign-on access solution to web resources and applications. These systems combined, offer students and staff and on-and off-campus information resources access and a user-friendly information search experience.

This unrestricted access to knowledge and information resources not only enriches the academic discourse, but also empowers individuals to conduct rigorous research and contribute meaningfully to their professions. Qualified librarians provide training on access to innovative research tools, software, and digital resources, to equip students with the skills necessary to thrive in a technologically driven academic information world. The available regulated loan services also ensure that library users can access and use the

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resources in the comfort of their residences at their own pace. In addition, students can access the library facilities for 14 hours per day during term and 16 hours per day during exams. Undergraduate information skills training.

To develop the necessary skills required for academic information seeking and searching, qualified Information Librarians are responsible for training undergraduate students in information literacy skills. The training is aimed at ensuring that undergraduate students develop the requisite knowledge and skills to maximally exploit both the print and online information resources available in the library. Structured information literacy training which is supported by the English Department is offered to all first-year students. Lessons are offered electronically, and students are assessed with an allocated mark which forms part of the year's English mark.

Postgraduate capacity building

The Library and Information Services continues to collaborate with the Research Directorate in developing research skills for postgraduate students under a project approved by the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG). The training is on research data management hosted by the University of Pretoria. This short course is aimed at early career researchers and teaches foundational research data management data science skills.

Open access publishing


The SMU Library and Information Services is a member of the South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLiC), which negotiates affordable subscription prices for

member institutions. SANLiC has successfully negotiated the following Transformative Agreements (TAs): Wiley, Springer, Sage, and Elsevier/Science Direct. These agreements enable researchers to publish free hybrid journals and get discounts on open-access articles. SMU researchers are beneficiaries of this initiative.

Social Cohesion

Beyond academic pursuits, the SMU library serves as a vibrant social hub, which fosters a sense of community among students, staff and researchers. The SMU library offers spaces for group meetings, and discussions, and nurtures interpersonal connections and interdisciplinary collaborations. By promoting inclusivity and diversity, the SMU library continues cultivating a rich tapestry of ideas and perspectives, essential for fostering top-notch, well-rounded professionals capable of navigating complex global land-scapes.

Student Feedback

The latest graduate exit survey report explicitly indicates that of the 412 respondents, 88% were satisfied to very satisfied with the library holdings, books, and other library collections, and 87% with library services. The ongoing refurbishment of the Library and Information Services building is intended to enhance the building for efficient and SMART library facilities and services. As a pillar of knowledge and learning, the SMU library continues to play an indispensable role in nurturing the next generation of leaders, innovators, scientists, medical practitioners, and change-makers across diverse professional landscapes. 



SMU Visited Lehwelereng High School to Celebrate International Day of the Midwives

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU)'s Department of Nursing Science (DNS) visited Lehwelereng High School in Hammanskraal as part of the commemoration of the International Day of the Midwives (IDM), with the theme, "Say yes to goals and dreams, and no to teenage pregnancy extremes". The visit

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was part of community engagement initiatives aimed at promoting midwifery through empowering, educating, and raising awareness to learners.

May 5th marks World and IDM, a day dedicated to recognizing the vital role that midwives play in providing quality healthcare to pregnant women, newborns, and their families around the world. Midwives are at the forefront of maternal and infant healthcare, offering support and guidance to expectant mothers before, during, and after childbirth.

During the IDM, organizations and individuals are encouraged to show their support for midwives by advocating for better working conditions, increased funding for midwifery programs, and improved access to education and training. By investing in midwifery services, we can improve maternal and infant health outcomes, reduce maternal mortality rates, and ensure that every woman has access to skilled and compassionate care during pregnancy and childbirth.

The visit was led by Midwifery lecturers, together with third and fourth-year nursing science students who provided learners with information regarding reproductive health, contraception, pregnancy, and childbirth, particularly addressing the needs and challenges of adolescents. SMU Midwifery students fostered a secure environment where learners could openly express their thoughts and concerns about issues pertinent to their age, such as peer pressure, relationships, and body image. This underscored the need to address not only the physical but also the emotional and psychological facets of adolescent health.

Final year, Bachelor of Nursing Science and Midwifery student, Promise Nhlabathi indicated that the visit offered her the opportunity to participate in a community outreach program.

Furthermore, she stated that this enriching experience opened her eyes to many aspects of adolescent health.

“We organized interactive sessions that covered sexual health, mental wellness, and making healthy lifestyle choices,” Nhlabathi said.

“Our workshops on sexual education were particularly impactful. We stressed the significance of consent, contraception, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The students' active engagement and insightful questions were heartening”, concluded Nhlabathi.



Nhlabathi added that the visit provided an enriching experience for both SMU students and Lehweleeng learners. The open discussions not only exposed myths but also equipped learners with the knowledge to make informed choices about their sexual and mental health. The magnitude of this event is evidence of the agility and appropriate responses of the

midwives graduating from SMU to the community health needs. Q



SMU supports the LGBTQIA+ community



SMU Department of Student Affairs in collaboration with the Aurum Institute POP INN hosted a 3-day LGBTQIA+ awareness campaign. The University prides itself in being an inclusive institution providing a non-sexist, non-discriminatory working, living, and studying environment for its students and employees where everyone will be able to achieve their full potential.

On 13 October 2023, a round table discussion about fostering inclusivity and support for SMU's LGBTQIA+ community was organized under the office of the Director: Student Affairs to re-organize this community in celebration of Pride Month. An organizing task team under the Advocacy and Diversity office was established to continue with the programmes of the project. This campaign should be seen as another strategy to assist the office towards developing policies that govern the structure of the LGBTQIA+.

The campaign featured LGBTQIA+ Activist, Creative Director of Moja Love's *The Way Ngingakhona* star, Dominic Zaca, and Aurum Institute POP INN project coordinator Happy Phaleng. They both addressed issues faced daily by people who are in the LGBTQIA+ community and shared words of encouragement to survive homophobes. The community was motivated to be brave and not be afraid of living their truth.

Bsc in Life Sciences final year student Morwakoma Ngwato stated that he attended the awareness campaign because of the sense of inclusion that was promoted for the LGBTQIA+ community. During the campaign, he learned that every individual deserves a fair chance at expressing themselves freely without judgment. He indicated that his highlights were the unveiling of the rainbow stairs at the staff cafeteria and the fun games that were played, including the music.

“My take-home lessons from the speakers that I resonate the most with include lack of accountability which promotes perpetuation of bad behaviour, queer rights are human rights, and ignorance is the enemy of progress. To those who fear living their truth in public, know that you are the greatest love of your life and there are spaces created specifically for you to express that love fully. Take advantage of the support offered because it is so much brighter outside of the closet,” motivates Morwakoma. ”

Discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community undermines the human rights principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even so, discrimination and violence against people in the LGBTQIA+ community are all too common. Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and discriminatory attitudes towards Queer people remain deeply embedded in many cultures around the world.





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