


“My older brother
Makhosi is
a Pharmacist”
- **Dr Mncengeli
Sibanda**


**Financial
sustainability**
at the heart of
the Academic
project



Meet
Dr Phophi Ramathuba
The Premier of Limpopo Province




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“...From milking goats to becoming the first Provincial citizen...”

In a historic moment, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Alumna, Dr Phophi Ramathuba was officially elected and sworn in to become the Premier of the Limpopo Province, on Friday, 14 June 2024. She became the first woman to lead the Province as a Premier since the dawn of democracy, 30 years ago. In her acceptance speech, she said that she is humbled and grateful to accept the responsibility entrusted to her as the Premier of her home Province.

Born on 15 August 1973 at Elim Hospital, Limpopo, Dr Ramathuba was raised at Ha-Mashamba village. She was one of five children born to teacher parents. When she was born, her mother did not have a standard six (which was then considered a good qualification), but she then went back to school to get a diploma and two degrees. In 2015, her father passed on, two weeks before she was appointed MEC for Health in Limpopo. She credits him for raising her well and teaching her how to milk goats because he never believed that household chores should be assigned based on gender. Dr Ramathuba is a mother of two daughters.

She is a distinguished medical professional and a political leader, holding a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) from SMU (then Medical University of Southern Africa - MEDUNSA), a Master's Degree in Medical Pharmacology from the University of Pretoria, an Advanced Health Management Certificate from Manchester Business School (MBS) in the United

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Kingdom, and Leadership for Physicians certificate from INSEAD Business School.

During her tenure as an undergraduate student at SMU, she was an activist with a rich history of service in progressive youth structures, notably, serving in the Provincial Executive Committee of the South African Student Congress (SASCO) - Gauteng Province. She continued to become the General Secretary of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and also its Deputy President. Her activism was deeply rooted in the struggle for better working conditions and workplace transformation. She is the founder of the South African Medical Association Trade Union (SAMATU), a former President of the South African Medical Association (SAMA), National Chair for Public Service Doctors, and has served on the central committee of the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) in her capacity as President of SAMA. She also served as Treasurer General of the Commonwealth Medical Association (CMA), Branch Secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP) Mokopane South and Limpopo Provincial Treasurer of the SACP.

Before venturing into politics, Dr Ramathuba cut her teeth as an intern at Mokopane Hospital, working her way up to Chief Executive Officer at the Voortrekker Hospital. In 2014, she was elected to the ANC's Limpopo Provincial Executive Committee (PEC). She was then appointed to serve as a Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) for Health in Limpopo, serving two terms from 2015 until 2024. Dr Ramathuba currently serves as a member of the ANC Limpopo Provincial Executive Committee and is the Deputy President of the South African Communist Party.

In her capacity as Premier of Limpopo she expressed appreciation for the opportunity to lead Limpopo towards prosperity and unity. In her maiden address she called upon the members of legislature to uphold their oversight role with diligence and dedication, ensuring that the administration of Limpopo serves the best interests of all its citizens.

“We will reach the pinnacle of this government's programme of action to liberate our people in general

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“Our jobs plan for Limpopo focuses on harnessing the potential of key economic sectors such as mining, agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism through industrialisation which will ensure inclusive prosperity for all our people. By leveraging on our natural resources, fostering entrepreneur-ship, and promoting sustainable development, we are paving the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for Limpopo as a gateway to the continent, thus contributing towards creating a better Africa and world,” she alluded.

and women in particular from poverty, hunger, unemployment, and inequality. As we run the gauntlet of the ensuing five years, we are on course with a cogent plan to achieve more rapid, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth and job creation; to reduce poverty and tackle the excessive cost of living; to build a capable, ethical, and developmental state. These three priorities are the mainstay of the seventh democratic administration,” explains Dr Ramathuba.

Dr Ramathuba said Limpopo stands ready to ensure that the priorities of her administration as identified, that is, job creation, fighting unemployment, providing services like water, roads, and others are converted into actions that will inform their endeavour to create a better life for all. She further indicated that these priorities will be elaborated in the development of the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024-2029.

She further stated that the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) initiative will be the province's major plan for industrialisation and job creation. The Musina Makhado SEZ is slowly getting off the ground, while the Fetakgomo-Tubatse Industrial Park (FTIP) is budding with hope upon which the province has placed high hopes for success.

“The FTIP has developed a positive investment pipeline of 32 domestic and global companies worth R56 billion, with the potential to create 6,000 jobs in the first five years of operation and a further 20,000 jobs over 10 years. Nine of the 32 investors are already confirmed to take residence in the park in the next 12 months. These are projected to invest just over R10 billion. This, we will live to see maturing into a realisable dream during the seventh Administration,” she confidently states.

In collaboration with various Sector Education and Training Authority (SETAs), the Premier indicated that they are embarking on skills development through apprenticeship and learnership programmes. To date, the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Sector Education Training Authority (merSETA) has committed R130 million targeting 500 candidates in the third quarter, and 460 in the fourth quarter to commence an apprenticeship programme in various critical sectors, including in motor mechanics, diesel mechanics, mechanical fitting, welding, and electrical trades.

The government's strategic focus on road infrastructure is underpinned by the pressing need to address the substantial backlog in road upgrades within the province. With a vast provincial road network spanning 19,800 km;

of which 66% (13,000 km) remains unpaved. The Premier said the biggest challenge with these gravel roads is not necessarily that they are unpaved, however, the fact that they have been neglected to blade, regravell and maintain them, is what makes her not sleep at night. The #DikgerekgereWednesdays project was born out of this concern. The aim of this project is to improve road infrastructure of the Limpopo Province by gradually blading, regravelling, and debushing gravel roads, especially, in areas that do not have tarred roads. Not only does this initiative boost the economic development of the province, but also creates employment for the locals as they are employed to continue with the maintenance of those roads.

Under her leadership, the province will introduce the high-speed train that will operate between Limpopo and Gauteng. She said, “We cannot over-emphasise the fact that the people of Limpopo are waiting with eagerness and anticipation, for the much-vaunted high-speed train, which will shorten the travelling time, between Gauteng and Limpopo. Upon completion, the high-speed train will not only benefit the tourism industry but is of critical importance and is likely to decrease traffic volumes on the N1 stretch by half, which is currently responsible for high road traffic accidents and fatalities”.



“A key aspect of this commitment is our unwavering stance against corruption and maladministration. We will implement robust anti-corruption strategies, ensuring that our actions are guided by the highest ethical standards. I also thank all my predecessors starting with Adv. Ngoako Ramatlhodi; Ambassador Sello Moloto; Deputy Minister Cassel Mathale and my immediate former boss Deputy Minister Stanley Mathabatha for the foundation they have laid down in advancing the development of our province,” she stated as a matter of fact.

She emphasised that ethical behaviour is the cornerstone of good governance, committing herself to the principles of integrity, transparency, and accountability.

Setbacks and failures are an inevitable part of the research process

Dr Xavier Siwe Noundou



Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University's (SMU) Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences Senior Lecturer, Dr. Xavier Siwe Noundou recently attained the prestigious National Research Foundation (NRF) C2 rating. This outstanding achievement, effective from 1 January 2024, to 31 December 2029, is a testament to Dr. Siwe Noundou's exceptional research contribution and solidifies his position as an established researcher in his field.

The NRF rating system identifies researchers who count among the leaders in their fields of expertise and recognises those who constantly produce high-quality research outputs. The rating of individuals is, primarily, based on the quality and impact of their research outputs over the past eight years, taking into consideration the evaluation made by local and international peers. The C2 rating means that all the reviewers are firmly convinced that the applicant is an established researcher as described.

"Securing a rating from the South African NRF marks a significant milestone in one's academic journey. It is a peer recognition of the quality and impact of one's research contributions. Moreover, an NRF rating may influence career advancement, enhance funding opportunities, and broaden collaborative prospects within the research community at national and international levels. This acknowledgement

serves not only as a personal achievement but also as a testament to the rigour and relevance of one's scholarly work. But beyond all, it is a massive responsibility to always aim and look for more and better achievements for the improvement of humankind," Dr Noundou shared delightfully.

The NRF-rated researchers often play a pivotal role in mentoring the next generation of scholars, thereby fostering a culture of research excellence within the institution. This, in turn, can lead to groundbreaking research and innovation (with potential intellectual properties), further enhancing the institution's standing and contribution to knowledge creation and societal development. Institutions leverage these ratings to position themselves strategically in the competitive field of higher education and research, which can have a profound impact on their growth and success.

"As an NRF-rated researcher, I am dedicated to remain at the cutting edge of my field, which requires a steadfast commitment to ongoing learning and development. I immerse myself in the latest research by engaging with contemporary and advanced literature, participating in top conferences within my speciality, and collaborating with renowned experts both locally and globally. Furthermore, I incorporate innovative techniques and methodologies into my research endeavours. I also endeavour to connect teaching with research, involving

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students in my projects to create a vibrant learning atmosphere where theoretical knowledge is applied," Dr Noundou remarked.

Dr Siwe Noundou hails from a small village called Babouantou in the West region of Cameroon. He has impressive academic qualifications at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. His qualifications include a Bachelor of Science (BSc) from the University of Dschang, Honours (Maitrise) in Chemistry, a Master of Science (MSc) in Chemistry University of Yaoundé, Cameroon and PhD in Chemistry from the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He served as a Senior Researcher and Gordon Betty and Moore Foundation Fellow, Rhodes University, Oregon State University (USA), University of California San Diego (USA), 2019-2020; Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology, Marine Natural Products (MNP) Research Chair, Rhodes University, 2017-2018, European Union Seventh Framework Programme (EU-FP7) Marie Curie Fellow, Kaposvar University (Hungary), Trakia University (Bulgaria), (2015-2016) and NRF Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Chemistry Department, Rhodes University, 2014-2016.

His research, primarily, focused on drug discovery and development, particularly in response to the emergence of new diseases like COVID-19, which lack effective treatments, as well as ongoing health challenges such as HIV/AIDS and various cancers. He engaged in funded projects aimed at identifying potential inhibitors for SARS-CoV-2, HIV, and other infectious or microbial diseases, in addition to cancer.

"The significance of my work lies in its contribution to the urgent need for novel and effective drugs that can combat pandemics and chronic diseases - issues that pose substantial societal burdens and severe threats to humanity. This endeavour is in line with the priorities of my department, which focuses on the discovery and development of innovative drugs to ensure sustainable and effective healthcare solutions for humanity," says Dr Noundou.

Dr Noundou plans to enhance his department's research profile, by designing innovative research projects that tackle real-world and contemporary issues and seek research funding from both national and international sources. He alluded that his focus would shift to producing high-quality publications that address pressing societal challenges and contribute to advancing his field.


"By aiming for reputable journals and conferences, we can increase the visibility of our department's research efforts. Furthermore, I will actively participate in academic and industry networks to disseminate our findings, which will foster collaborations leading to excellent joint projects and grants. In addition to research activities, I am committed to mentoring students and junior researchers, promoting a culture of excellence and inquiry among our postgraduate students, thereby reinforcing our department's standing as a beacon of research and innovation," he said.

He explains that integrating research experience into teaching can significantly enrich the learning process for both instructors and students. "In my classes, I find it particularly rewarding to engage with students by not only listening to their perspectives but also sharing insights from my own academic and research journey. For example, incorporating case studies from recent research projects into the curriculum allows students to interact with the latest developments and advanced techniques in the field. This method enlivens the material and illustrates the practical applications of theoretical knowledge," he added.

Dr Noundou emphasized the integration of cutting-edge experimental techniques from the laboratory into classroom experiments. He indicated that this approach provides students with practical experience using the most advanced and sophisticated methods, enhancing their grasp of the subject. In two particular modules, the techniques derived from lab research were incorporated into the curriculum, and data gathered using high-resolution instruments served as educational materials. This strategy helps students become more proficient in data analysis and interpretation.

"One project that stands out for me involved the discovery of a natural product which exhibited significant anti-cancer and anti-HIV activity in vitro. Remarkably, this compound demonstrated greater activity than the reference drug typically used as a positive control in HIV treatment. Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) tools, we were able to hypothesize a mechanism of action for how this natural compound interacts with the virus," Dr Noundou expressed.

Dr Noundou indicated that the research journey is as rewarding as it is challenging. It is important to cultivate a deep curiosity about the world and a passion for discovery. "Networking is also key; attend conferences, join professional associations, and connect with peers and experts in your field. Communication skills are essential, so practice writing and presenting your ideas clearly and concisely. Remember that research often involves collaboration, so developing teamwork skills is important. Be prepared for setbacks and failures; they are an inevitable part of the research process and valuable learning processes. Stay resilient and adaptable, as research directions can change with new findings," he advised the aspiring researchers.

He concluded by stating that innovative and sustainable achievements are often the result of multidisciplinary teams, where each member contributes a vital piece to the larger puzzle. Moreover, he stated that to nurture collaboration, he prioritizes open communication, the establishment of shared objectives, and a deep respect for the unique insights each researcher offers. Consistent meetings and transparent, collective documentation ensure alignment among team members. Furthermore, utilizing collaborative tools and platforms can boost productivity and facilitates the smooth integration of disparate workflows. 



“Pushing boundaries in pursuit of excellence and impactful research,”

Dr Lateef Jolaoso's journey towards becoming a Y2 NRF rated researcher

collaborations, funding, and career advancement opportunities. His rating is valid from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2029.

“Becoming an NRF-rated researcher requires a combination of personal motivation, institutional support, a track record of high-quality research, and a thorough application process. The guidance and encouragement from mentors, in particular, Prof Maggie Aphane, HOD: Mathematics and Applied Mathematics and Prof Mapaseka Seheri, Director of Research and Innovation, including participation in supportive programmes like the Mathematical Sciences Early Career Fellowship significantly enhanced my chances of achieving this esteemed recognition” affirms Dr Lateef Jolaoso.

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Receiving a National Research Foundation (NRF) Y2 rating marks a significant milestone in Mathematics Research Associate, Dr Lateef Jolaoso's research career. This prestigious acknowledgement within the South African academic community reflects a global recognition of his contribution to the discipline of mathematics. It validates years of dedication and hard work, instilling a deep sense of achievement and enhancing his credibility, opening doors to

The Y category and Y2 sub-category are defined as Y for Young researchers (40 years or younger), who have held the doctorate or equivalent qualification for less than five years at the time of application, and who are recognised as having the potential to establish themselves as researchers within five years after evaluation, based on their performance and productivity of quality research outputs during their doctoral studies and/or early post-doctoral careers. Y2 refers to a researcher who is recognised by the overriding majority of reviewers as having the potential to establish themselves as a researcher (demonstrated by recent research outputs).

The NRF rating offers several benefits to him as a researcher among which are increased funding opportunities, enhanced reputation and prestige in his field, career advancement for promotions, engaging in meaningful collaborations, and mentoring the next generation of scholars.

Regarding his research journey, he said, “My research journey began at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), where I pursued my postgraduate studies. I completed both my MSc and PhD at UKZN, laying the foundation for my academic and research career. I joined SMU in March 2020 as a postdoctoral fellow, contributing to the research outputs at the institution. I further moved to the United Kingdom (UK) and joined the University of Southampton as a research fellow in 2022. I was later promoted to an Assistant Professor in 2023 at the same institution”.

His research interest was sparked through the rigorous supervision and mentorship he received from his PhD advisor. His supervisor's guidance not only helped him to develop a strong foundation in research methodologies but also ignited a passion for discovery and knowledge. This experience motivated him to maintain a high level of dedication and continually strive for self-improvement in both his research and personal relationships.

“My research area of expertise is continuous optimization and its applications in real-life scenarios. This includes fields such as machine learning, image processing, and operational research. I focus on developing and applying optimization algorithms to solve complex problems and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of various systems in these areas”.

“One of my proudest research achievements was becoming a Fellow of the Institute of Mathematics and Its Applications (IMA) in the United Kingdom” he said. This prestigious recognition signifies global acknowledgement of his contributions to the field of Mathematics and establishes his credibility within the international academic community. His research focus has evolved, significantly, since completing his PhD. Initially, his PhD work centred on fixed point theory and optimization using fixed point methods.

“During my time at SMU, I shifted to working primarily on nonlinear optimization and its applications. Currently, in the

UK, I focus mainly on the applications of optimization in machine learning, image processing, and operational research. This continuous evolution and pursuit of excellence motivate me to push boundaries and strive for impactful research,” he asserts.

Currently, he is actively engaged in research projects focused on the applications of nonconvex optimization in two primary areas, namely, machine learning and financial portfolio. He has designed a comprehensive research proposal outlining these projects. He has submitted this proposal to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), a prominent funding body in the UK similar to the NRF in South Africa. He is hopeful that securing funding through this proposal will enable him to expand his team and further advance these research initiatives.

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought to light the importance of mathematics in society. Mathematics research has a profound impact on society at large, influencing various aspects of our daily lives and driving innovation in numerous fields. It not only expands an understanding of fundamental principles but also drives practical innovations that enhance the quality of life, foster economic prosperity, address societal challenges, and pave the way for a more technologically advanced and sustainable future.

Engaging in research activities is not only intellectually stimulating but also incredibly rewarding. It offers opportunities to contribute to global developments, stimulate personal and intellectual growth, and for one to make a positive impact on society.

“I am grateful to have worked at SMU after completing my PhD, as it provided me with an opportunity to join as a postdoctoral fellow. Working at SMU, I enjoyed a supportive research environment which was instrumental in shaping my research trajectory and contributing to my professional growth as a researcher. SMU fostered a sense of community within the Mathematics and Applied Mathematics Department in me. This has continued to sharpen my engagement and collaboration with the department,” concludes Dr Jolaoso.

“Current treatment methods offered little help to improve my mother's condition...”

Dr Vuyisile Samuel Thibane's drive towards becoming an NRF rated researcher



The NRF rating system is a key driver in building a globally competitive science system in South Africa. The system encourages researchers to publish high-quality outputs in high-impact journals and outlets. SMUs Biochemistry and Biotechnology Lecturer and Researcher, Dr Vuyisile Samuel Thibane's recent NRFY2 rating is based primarily on the quality and impact of his research outputs over the past eight years, taking into consideration the evaluation made by local and international peers.

Dr Thibane is counted among the leaders in his field of expertise and gives recognition to those who constantly produce high-quality research outputs. “Personally, this NRF rating is a testament that hard work will eventually be recognised. Professionally, the rating symbolised that I have the potential to establish myself as an established researcher when looking at the impact of my recent research outputs as perceived by my peers,” said Dr Thibane.

Rated researchers have a competitive edge over other researchers when it comes to funding applications as they have demonstrated their abilities to conduct high impact research. Supervisors also impart cutting-edge skills to the next generation of researchers. In addition, there are funding incentives from the NRF to enable rated researchers to maintain their rating by continuing to conduct research with high impact.

“Being a researcher requires a lot of time reading research articles and dedication to conducting research with impact. If you can harness those two skills, you are already on the right track to being a good researcher,” emphasises Thibane.

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He indicated that his research journey started when he first enrolled for a Master's degree in biotechnology at the University of Free State (UFS) in 2010. After completing his Master's degree, he thought that was the end of his academic journey as he left to go and work in the manufacturing industry for three years. He came back to academia in 2015 as a doctoral candidate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), conducting research in plant sciences. After completing his doctoral degree, he continued as a postdoctoral research fellow with the University of South Africa (UNISA) and was later appointed in 2021 as a lecturer at SMU where he is currently pursuing his career as a Lecturer and Researcher.

“Since joining SMU, I have learned that I can contribute to the provision of quality healthcare service with the work I do in the fields of Biochemistry and Biotechnology. My research interests are across different fields of Ethnobotany, Ethnopharmacology, Biotechnology, Medical Biochemistry, Biomedical Sciences and Bio-entrepreneurship. I have established a research group called the Biotechnology and Healthcare Innovation Research Unit (BAHIRU),” he acknowledges.

“I never thought I would settle for a career in academia; hence I left and joined the manufacturing industry earlier in my career. However, upon my return to academia as a doctoral candidate, at UKZN and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), I got to understand the direct impact of research on people's lives. I have always wanted to make a change to people's lives and academia has thus far enabled me to do so through teaching and learning in the classroom or conducting impactful research”, he further stated.

Dr Thibane is a principal investigator and currently supervises and co-supervises a total of 14 students (2 PhD, 7 MSc and 5 Honours). He has authored/co-authored a total of 17 peer-reviewed papers with a total of 577 citations (H index, 8). He also serves as a member of the School of Science and Technology Research Committee (SSTRC). Furthermore, he is also a reviewer of the journals MDPI, Journal of Ethnopharmacology, Frontiers in Pharmacology and the South African Journal of Botany.

“With Biochemistry-related research, we can understand how specific pathways involved in the progression of diseases can be altered or manipulated to provide good health. Biotechnology-related projects promote bio-entrepreneurship through the formulation of products from any of the additives that would have been identified through biochemical research. Both these disciplines combine to offer good health and promote entrepreneurship while further contributing to poverty alleviation,” he explains.

He said together with his research team, they have several research projects that mainly focus on the exploitation of medicinal plants and natural products for their medicinal,

nutraceutical and cosmeceutical properties. Regarding medicinal research, their main focus is on exploiting the indigenous knowledge of the use of medicinal plants for their therapeutic potential in treating gynaecological disorders such as uterine fibroids, polycystic ovarian syndrome and endometrial cancer. The team is currently working on developing early detection systems for these gynaecological disorders. They also have a small team working on investigating the effects of metabolites from endophytic fungi for their therapeutic effect against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. Furthermore, they are also working on COVID-19-related projects by investigating the effect of medicinal plants indigenous to South Africa for their anti-viral and anti-inflammatory potential.

With regard to nutraceutical, the team is looking at different preservation methods of indigenous leafy vegetables while further investigating their effects against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. Under cosmeceuticals, together with CSIR, the team is first investigating the effects of oils extracted from marine sources in promoting follicle hair formation which will later be incorporated into products that can be used against hairline loss.

At a personal level, Dr Thibane, stated that his mother suffered from several ailments such as cervical cancer, hypertension, and diabetes, and that she later succumbed to a diabetes-related condition as current treatment methods offered little help to improve her condition. This has led him to Dr Thibane's current research focus.

“I am the last born of three brothers raised by a single mother from Botshabelo township, in the Free State Province. As a child, I never saw myself as a lecturer or researcher. I grew up as an introvert and I was never a person to speak in public spaces. However, I have gotten to love and embrace this path that life has brought me to and appreciate how I am contributing to the transformation of so many lives that come through the gates of SMU,” shares Dr Thibane, who started his junior schooling at Thabo Primary School and later went to Seemahale Secondary School. In 2008 he enrolled for a bachelor's degree in biotechnology at the UFS.

In conclusion, he lists several achievements that stand out for him:

- Passing his MSc degree with *cum laude* and being awarded the 'best MSc dissertation in Yeast Science' from the University of the Free State in 2012.
- Invitation to join the UKZN Golden Key International Honour Society in 2019, following successful completion of his doctoral degree.
- Being awarded a Thuthuka research grant from the NRF, valued at R780 000, in 2023.
- Being awarded a junior research fellowship grant by the DHET, valued at R945 000 in 2024
- The most recent, being awarded an NRF Y2 rating in 2024.📄

“I met my wife at this University”

Dr Gontse Thobejane's journey towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health



Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health, Gontse Thobejane's Doctoral study was about the performance management of healthcare workers. What interested him in this area of research was that public sector healthcare workers are often the recipients of harsh criticism from the community members they serve. The communities feel that healthcare workers' performance is not meeting their expectations. As such, he was convinced that there must be a system to monitor, develop and improve the performance of healthcare workers. Hence, he decided to choose this research focus area.

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“The research's impact was that it made discoveries that some of the challenges hindering the performance of healthcare workers were systemic. These included a lack of resources and inadequate policy implementation. Additionally, some of the challenges had to do with healthcare workers themselves in terms of their knowledge and interpretation of policies. Interventions were made to address these challenges,” he explains.

As a result of his background as an audiologist, he has been involved in research involving auditory pathologies, especially those linked with Otitis Media. However, having focused on health systems and health policy during his public health degrees, he has also researched health systems and health policies. In the future, he would also like to move to other areas of public health research until he develops a niche area.

“To develop and improve as a researcher, I am extremely fortunate to have supportive, experienced, and expert mentor behind me who has been more than willing to play a significant role in my development thus far. I acknowledge that I still have a lot to learn as learning is a lifelong journey,” acknowledges the Chief Speech Therapist and Audiologist, at Brits District Hospital.

His journey to become a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health began when he was still busy with his Bachelor of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology at SMU. He used to pass the Public Health building on his way to his residential area at 5A, so he asked someone, “*What is in there*” and he discovered that it was the Public Health Department. He found it to have very few limitations in terms of what he could research in the healthcare space. What further convinced him was the fact that their Master of Public Health degree also had coursework in areas such as health systems, epidemiology, and health promotion. He saw this as an opportunity and immediately knew that he was going to enrol for his Master's in the Public Health

Department even when he was still an undergraduate student.

After obtaining a Master's degree, he went on an extended break from academia due to being busy with both his professional and family life. However, he stayed connected with some colleagues and later decided to enrol for a PhD. One of his colleagues and friend said to him, “You know Gontse a master's degree is like a bridge, if you do not go for a PhD, you will forever be on the bridge.”

So being a person who has always been uncomfortable with the concept of not finishing what he started, he decided to enrol for his PhD.

“SMU is my only alma mater. It is my 'hometown' university. All three of my degrees are from this University. I did my B SLP&A from 2006-2009 and Master of Public Health from 2013-2015. I then completed my PhD in 2024. It has been an enjoyable journey. I grew up on this campus and it

always feels like home. It is a learning environment that is not for the faint-hearted which tests and develops character. A number of my family members have graduated from this institution, so I guess you can see that there is a deep sense of connection and loyalty that exists. There is a wealth of expert academics and professionals that have equipped me to play a role, professionally and academically,” he applauds his alma mater.

All the lifelong relationships he gained, and all the days spent socialising and studying with his friends rank among his fond memories of SMU.

The Ga-Rankuwa-born Doctor concluded by reminiscing about his primary schooling in Brits and high schooling in Hartbeespoort. He said the irony is that...

“Most people attained their education in their township (Ga-Rankuwa) and then left their township to go to other universities. To the contrary, I left my township to pursue my primary and secondary schooling and then returned to his township to attend University (SMU)”.

Growing up, he was a mischievous boy who had strict parents who did not compromise on education. And today, he can safely say they are the reason he is where he is today.👤

“I met my wife at this University. I made lifelong friends on this campus, and I always feel a sense of pride when I come across pictures of us in our first year of undergraduate studies and I look at us now. Those are the fond memories I have,” fondly alluded.

“My older brother Makhosi is a Pharmacist”
-Dr Mncengeli Sibanda



SMU Alumnus, Lecturer, and Acting HOD of Public Health Pharmacy and Management (PHPM), Dr Mncengeli Sibanda was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Pharmacy during the 2024 graduation ceremony. The title of his thesis is *'Vaccination uptake amongst geriatrics in South Africa: A multi-centre study.'*

“My older brother Makhosi is a pharmacist, and he is the one who piqued my interest in pharmacy. I would often enquire about his studies when he came back home from the university, and this was where the dream to become a pharmacist was birthed.”

Dr Sibanda conducted a comprehensive investigation into vaccine uptake amongst the elderly and their healthcare workers at selected community health centres and old age homes throughout nine provinces of South Africa. Traditionally, there has been a focus on childhood vaccines and less on vaccination for the elderly. However, due to population ageing and the vulnerability of the elderly to diseases such as influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, and herpes zoster, he then focused on a life-course approach to vaccination, specifically, vaccination of the elderly.

“The recommendations stemming from my study included promoting vaccination as a strategy for healthy ageing in South Africa. An immunisation programme for

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the elderly should be prioritised, understood, communicated, and implemented. This immunisation programme should be accompanied by the requisite logistical and financial support, increased access to vaccines, and an economic evaluation of vaccination programmes for the elderly. Concurrently, interventions targeting the elderly and their healthcare workers should be implemented to increase awareness of the elevated risk of complications and death due to vaccine-preventable diseases among the elderly,” explained the Alumnus.

Reflecting on his experience, he stated that pharmacy is such a diverse and exciting field, which he would recommend to anyone with a passion for science and helping the community. He further stated that said pharmacy is one of those very versatile professions that allow individuals many options after qualifying. He said pharmacists can work in a community or hospital pharmacy; in industry as a pharmaceutical manufacturer; an academic; a public health practitioner and also work for medicine regulators who ensure that medications are of excellent quality and fit for use by the community.

“To be honest, SMU was not my first-choice university for postgraduate studies due to the positive publicity that other universities enjoyed. However, after doing my research and reflecting on my career plans, I concluded that SMU was the best place to study. The Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) in PHPM offered by SMU is a one-of-a-kind qualification that no other university in South Africa offers,” informed Dr Sibanda.

Apart from his PhD, Dr Sibanda also obtained his MPharm in PHPM at SMU in 2016. He currently serves as a Scientific Advisor for the South African Vaccination and Immunisation Centre (SAVIC) at SMU; a member of the School of Pharmacy Research Ethics Committee; Northern Branch committee member of the South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists (SAAHIP); a member of One Health Trust and the Global Antibiotic Resistance Partnership (GARP)-South Africa technical working group. He is a former member of the Pricing Committee of the National Department of Health (NDoH).

“After many years of practising pharmacy in different sectors, I realised that I had an interest in teaching. This coincided with the time I was busy with my postgraduate studies when I also realised that I was enthusiastic about research. It made sense to choose to go into academia and pursue my interests,” shared Dr Sibanda.


As a lecturer, Dr Sibanda oversees Public Health Pharmacy and Management (PHPM) student activities and coordinating the post-graduate course. He further stated

that as lecturers they often encounter challenges caused by the delays their students have in getting permission to conduct their research at different facilities. In order to deal with such issues, they always engage with other departments and organisations to ensure that time for approvals is not prolonged. They also provide training on time management because many postgraduate students are studying part-time and often struggle with the work-study-family balance, which helps to some extent.

The PHPM Lecturer also contributes towards research and innovation and indicated that his research niche is vaccinology. He emphasized that they keep producing numerous graduates because the School of Pharmacy (SOP) has a wide offering of postgraduate programmes with a good yearly throughput rate.

“We also provide a personalised approach to our post-graduate system and check on them often to ensure that no one falls behind on their work,” he said.

He explained that SMU, being a historically Black university, provides an enabling environment to many students, particularly those from disadvantaged back-grounds, thus promoting equity in higher education. He further mentioned that there is good institutional support in terms of access to training in research methodology and on the use of data analysis, software amongst others. His aim as a Lecturer is to produce pharmacists who can compete in any space in South Africa and beyond. In addition, the goal is also to make sure that all of his postgraduate students present their work at conferences and publish their findings in scientific journals.

“A successful research term starts by choosing meaningful research which will potentially have a great impact on society and even change lives,” concludes the Alumnus. 

“Kindness, humility and respect are fundamental to my leadership approach”

HOD of Nuclear Medicine, Dr Dineo Tsabedze



Renowned Nuclear Medicine Specialist, Dr Dineo Tsabedze (née Mpanya) was recently appointed as the new Academic and Clinical Head of the Department (HOD): Nuclear Medicine at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) and the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMAH), respectively. Dr Tsabedze brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to her new role, with a strong track record of delivering exceptional patient care and advancing the nuclear medicine field through research and education.

“I am deeply honoured and privileged to have been appointed to such a significant role. I find myself in an environment with robust support and direct access to key decision-makers. This has provided a fertile ground for making a meaningful difference,” she said.

She holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from the University of the Witwatersrand and is a Fellow of the College of Nuclear Physicians of South Africa [FCNP (SA)]. She also holds a Master of Medicine (Nuclear Medicine), passed Cum Laude, from the University of the Witwatersrand; and a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) from the University of Cape Town. Her achievements include 26 research papers in reputable medical journals, presentations at international conferences and receiving grants and research awards.

The Nuclear Medicine Department stands on three pillars, namely, clinical service, teaching and learning, and research and innovation. Her vision is to enhance service delivery by reducing the turnaround time for

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patient reports and ensuring uninterrupted diagnostic and therapeutic services. She aims to increase the pass rate among trainees by creating a trainee-driven academic programme with continuous evaluation and fostering a data-centric environment that boosts research output through increased research publications. She is also eager to learn innovative technologies and methods, collaborate with multidisciplinary teams, and contribute to the scientific community.

She indicated that her leadership style is inclusive, maintaining close communication with all staff members in the department, and ensuring that everyone, from cleaners to clerks and nurses, has a voice. She also plans to motivate her colleagues by awarding certificates and prizes to those who go beyond their call of duty to serve patients. Kindness, humility, and respect are fundamental to her leadership approach, as she believes that when people feel respected and valued, they are more likely to align with the department's goals. She said, "While I am strict about adhering to policies and regulations, I maintain an open-door policy where colleagues feel appreciated and supported. I lead by example. Despite living 90 kilometres away from SMU and DGMAH, I ensure that I arrive at work by 7:15 a.m. to address issues promptly, which motivates my colleagues to start the day early and improve workflow."

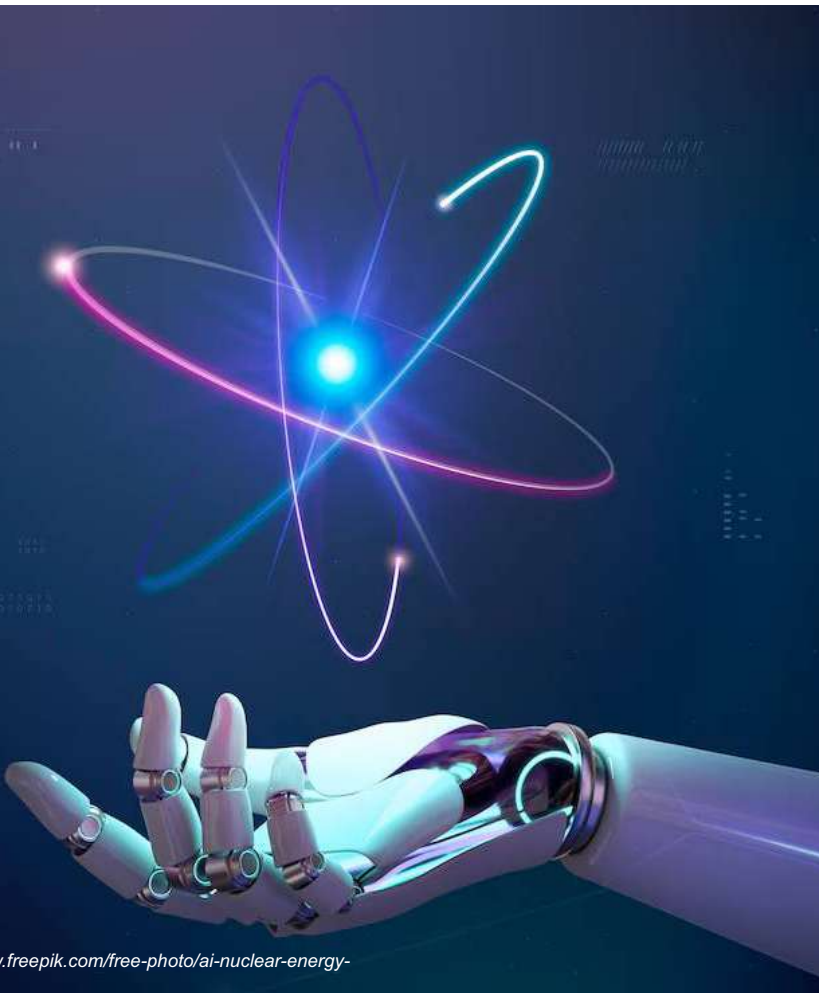
As patient management is moving into the era of precision medicine, Nuclear Medicine will be at the forefront, leveraging both clinical and imaging parameters to answer

clinical questions. For oncology patients, they will continue to develop disease-specific radiopharmaceuticals that allow them to detect and treat conditions with targeted therapy. The treatment plans will be tailored to individual patients, ensuring that they treat the right patient with the right therapy at the right time, in line with the principles of precision medicine. Additionally, she said that they will be well-positioned to utilize machine learning and deep learning to develop risk prediction tools and automated software for image generation, segmentation, and analysis. She is committed to creating databases and registries that archive clinical variables and raw imaging data. She foresees a future where they harness artificial intelligence to transform patient care and significantly enhance their research output.

"I have established a minimum standard for the number of research papers that must be published by joint academic and clinical staff in the department. I encourage interdepartmental research collaborations and ensure that my colleagues lead research projects. We conduct weekly academic seminars and journal club meetings involving all staff members, medical doctors, physicists, radiopharmacists, and radiographers. I also share invitations to training workshops, such as the leadership and transformation workshop, organised by the School of Medicine," alluded Dr Tsabedze.

She further said that to prioritise patient safety and satisfaction, the Nuclear Medicine department is currently reviewing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for booking diagnostic and therapeutic procedures to improve efficiency and reduce waiting times. They are also revising imaging protocols to ensure evidence-based patient-centred practices. Additionally, they have implemented a system where patients can anonymously document their experiences in the department. Recently, they added signage at the entrance of the department to alert women of child-bearing age about the risks of radiation exposure to a developing foetus. Furthermore, they plan to enhance the ambience in the patient waiting areas by procuring two new television sets and adding plants.

"As the HOD, I ensure that I am well-versed in all policy and regulatory documents and work closely with the Radiation Officer in the department to maintain compliance. I attend and present data at congresses. I also attend weekly journal club meetings, and I use an app that notifies me whenever a new research article is published online," concludes Dr Tsabedze, who is enthusiastic about advancing the field of artificial intelligence in medicine and improving the quality of care and outcomes for patients.📍



<https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/ai-nuclear-energy->

“ ...despite giving birth to her first child in the first year and welcoming her second child at the end of the program...”



Dr. Kyarkanaye's

journey into academia

Born in KwaZulu-Natal, Dr. Kyarkanaye earned an Honours degree in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology from the University of Durban-Westville (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal) in 1997. Her professional journey started at the Johannesburg General Hospital (now Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital), where she quickly rose to become a senior therapist after just two years, promoted "out of turn". This early success set the tone for her distinguished career.

From 2000 to 2021, Dr. Kyarkanaye served at the Kalafong Provincial Tertiary Hospital, spending two decades as the Head of Department. Her experience includes patient care, student training, management, serving on various committees, developing guidelines, protocols, and procedures, as well as contributing at an executive level to both professional and hospital-related matters. In recognition of her exceptional contributions, she was honoured with the CEO's 2016 Individual Recognition Award for Outstanding Performance and Service Excellence.

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While working at the Kalafong Provincial Tertiary Hospital in 2004, Dr. Kyarkanaye completed her Master's degree from the University of Pretoria. Remarkably, she completed her degree within the minimum period of two years, despite giving birth to her first child in the first year and welcoming her second child at the end of the program. She continued her academic journey by pursuing a PhD at the University of Pretoria, which she completed in 2016 within the minimum timeframe of four years. Her research delved into the dynamic realms of early childhood intervention, disability, and family-centred practices. The voices of caregivers of children with disabilities needed to be heard and the collaboration between caregivers and professionals was considered paramount. Her PhD was recognised with the prestigious Semantic Compaction Systems Award for the best PhD of that year. Dr. Kyarkanaye presented her PhD research at the 2016 International Early Intervention Conference at the University of Stockholm, Sweden. Earlier, in 2012, at the University of Jönköping, Sweden, she presented her work on the environmental factors affecting children with disabilities in South Africa.

A significant milestone in Dr. Kyarkanaye's career was the development and implementation of a two-year Speech Therapy and Audiology Assistant program, which gained approval from the HPCSA in January 2017. The path to approval was challenging, as the program faced initial rejection. However, Dr. Kyarkanaye's unwavering persistence and determination led her to reapply and successfully advocate for the program, which was ultimately approved. This approval allowed speech therapy and audiology assistants at the Kalafong Provincial Tertiary Hospital to register with the HPCSA. In 2019, Dr. Kyarkanaye further bolstered her qualifications by earning an Advanced Diploma in Management (Cum Laude). Her remarkable career in healthcare laid a solid foundation for her transition into academia.

In addition to her remarkable achievements, Dr. Kyarkanaye plays an active role on various committees at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. She serves on the Undergraduate Research Committee, the Postgraduate Research Committee, and holds the position of Deputy Chairperson for both the Marketing Committee and the Internationalisation Committee. Additionally, she is the Deputy Chairperson of the Capacity Building Sub-Committee within the Post-graduate Committee.

In 2022, Dr. Kyarkanaye joined Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), driven by her belief that she could make a meaningful impact on the lives of students; a realisation that began while training students at the hospital level. Her journey at SMU started with some challenges but she soon found her footing. Over the course of two years, Dr.

Kyarkanaye achieved remarkable success. Initially anxious about teaching the notoriously challenging subject of dysphagia - known for its difficulty and historically low pass rates among students - Dr. Kyarkanaye overcame her concerns and successfully guided her students to a 100% pass rate this year.

Since transitioning into academia, Dr. Kyarkanaye has authored four research articles, two of which were accepted for publication in the South African Journal of Higher Education. Another was submitted to the International Journal of Infants and Young Children, while the fourth, in collaboration with Public Health, is under review by a health journal in South Africa. She has also supervised undergraduate students and is currently guiding master's students in their postgraduate studies. 



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“Generosity was a common practice to them...”

The story of Covenant Ngomana



The 23 year old Covenant Ngomana was born and raised in Mpumalanga, Bushbuckridge in the dusty streets of LillydaleTrust - Nkwinyamahembe. He was raised by both parents alongside three siblings.

Due to the prevailing circumstances, his mother started a sewing business, sewing comforters, clothes and other material. On the other hand, his dad was hustling in the best way he knew how. As Covenant reflected, their efforts made “us who we are today”.

Educationally, Covenant started schooling at Rhandzekile Primary school, went to Hlomani Secondary, and then enrolled for Bachelor of Pharmacy (Hons.) that he completed last year (2023) at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, where he is currently registered for an MPharm in the School of Pharmacy.

Taking into consideration his financial situation at home, this meant that he had to work very hard to change the circumstances back at home. Of course, the situation was difficult because he never really had any privileges most primary school and secondary school kids had. As he reflected, “I am grateful for the principles my parents taught me because they helped me to never succumb to the peer pressure that confronted me”.

With very little knowledge on career paths, Covenant didn't know exactly what career path to follow. However, he was sure of the fact that he always found satisfaction and contentment being at the service of other people. He credits his parents for this passion to serve others because even though they didn't have much, generosity was a common practice to them. His mother, alongside her friends, established a private daycare centre in the village in response to teenage pregnancy which was contributing to increasing high school dropouts. They didn't have any funders, and this meant that they sometimes had to sacrifice food from home to feed the kids at the daycare because the mothers of the children were only paying the bare minimum to support the centre. “My mother did this for almost 6 years without any remuneration, only volunteering until her last breath”, he remembers.

Covenant decided to pursue a career in the healthcare system so that he could interact with patients and improve their quality of life and to satisfy his passion and be content. Holding a bachelor's degree in pharmacy mostly places a person in the main pharmacy to provide pharmacist-initiated therapy and dispense medication. However, he always wanted direct interaction with patients in the wards to provide pharmaceutical care – patient-centred care. This justifies his reason to pursue a Master of Pharmacy degree in Clinical Pharmacy.

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When he started his university studies, everything was awesome with the prospect of becoming a pharmacist. However, this journey was not as easy as it may appear to many. It demanded strong mental strength, faith and an indomitable spirit. When he started his degree in 2019, in the course of the year, he lost his beloved maternal aunt, whose funeral he could not even attend because he had exams and there was also no money to cover the travel costs. In 2020, his maternal grandfather also passed away in October and again, due to the same reasons he could not go back home to attend the funeral and because he was all alone at the university, he needed to be strong for himself and find a way to perform well in his academics. Thankfully, despite all these challenges he was able to progress to the next level.

However, in 2021, the situation got even worse when his maternal grandmother sadly passed on. As he reflects on these experiences, he said, "I remember I said a prayer to God to protect my loved ones because I could no longer deal with loss and grief. Well, I am not quite certain if the prayer did reach God. Excuse me, I do not mean to be sacrilegious in any way. It turned out that my grandmother's funeral was the last time I saw my beloved mother who sadly passed on the 31st of July, just 5 months after we had laid my grandmother to rest. My whole world collapsed on that day and my life has never been the same since then. We laid her to rest on a Friday the 06th. What was sad in this situation is that I had final assessments coming up in less than 2 weeks and during this period, the university had the Exemption rule that required 60% for a pass. I had to return back to the University on the 08th so that I could study because I was doing a very difficult module at that time".

In the morning of the 08th just when he was about to leave, his paternal grandmother, who was taken care of by his mother passed on that morning. He did not even attend his grandmother's funeral. As a 20-year-old boy, he had to come back to the university like nothing happened.

Those who were in class with him would be very shocked to learn of all these challenges because he was their deputy class representative, advocating for them when the need arose despite his challenges. Eventually he failed that module with 59% and also failed the re-assessment with 45%. He fought so hard to pass all remaining modules. He repeated that one module in 2022 and he passed it, and he completed the degree last year (2023) against all odds.

One question may arise, "how did you overcome these great tragedies?" In 2022, because he was repeating only one module, he dedicated his time to personal and leadership development. He started to reflect on what had transpired the previous years and confronted his pain. He used his NSFAS book allowance to get a driver's license, bought some books and started reading a lot of literature. It was exactly during this period that the idea of a debate club was born. During the same period, he discovered the South American Business Forum (SABF), an organization that selected him to attend a conference in Argentina. He started being intentional about the life choices he had to make. "My dream had fallen apart the day I learned of my mother's passing because most of my dreams were tied to her and my father. She was my biggest cheerleader and understood me better than everyone else and, in our conversations, I had always told her that one day I would go abroad and do wonderful things. I am pleased that I have lived up to that promise."

"In my solitude, I decided to hunt opportunities for personal and professional development. Through the social media, I came across the South American Business Forum (SABF) organization. The SABF bring together current and future leaders regardless of their generation and nationalities, creating a platform open to dialogue and debate with the aim of ideating plans which will allow the sustainable development of the world, through the invaluable exchange of perspectives. The Forum's ideal is to promote the values that leaders must pursue in order to contribute to the world's sustainable development."

The SABF annually opens applications for students and recent graduates across the whole world. The application process includes a comprehensive CV, a thought process test, and creative writing based on a selected topic. The SABF only selects 100 candidates to attend a weeklong conference in South America, Argentina, Buenos Aires. Thankfully, Covenant was selected amongst the top 100 candidates. The SABF covered all expenses including accommodation, meals, and traveling around Argentina for the period of his stay.

The main theme of the conference was "*Beyond the established*" with subtopics, "*Behind the influence*", "*Individuality*", and "*The scenery of change*". For his creative writing, he wrote his original work on the latter topic highlighting a different perspective on how one can extract meaning from experience in the context of change.

"The subject of *Behind the influence* outlined that as human beings, we tend to choose leaders or role models to follow and we continue to do so today in the form of government officials, religious figures, economic leaders, and more recently, on social media. The decisions made by these leaders, whatever their sphere, directly or indirectly affect our lives".

I participated in student presentations given by fellow participants, which were inspiring to learn about the great work other students are doing across the world, Interactive workshops with speakers, given to a reduced audience in groups diving into more specific aspects of the topics, Mentoring sessions in even more reduced groups with mentors, which allowed one-on-one discussions to evaluate the visions and learnings that were absorbed during the conference. I also participated in activities such as spectrum and debate sessions where I was leading my debate side. The wealth of knowledge from the conference will extend to everyone in my network and my beloved Phamily at SMU.

This opportunity was a good learning curve in my career as a young pharmacist. Who would have thought that a young and ambitious boy from the villages, with limited resources, who grew up herding cows and practicing farming could turn out to be an international asset?

"I think as young professionals, we should challenge ourselves to go beyond the demarcations and horizons of our chosen careers to become better individuals before we are great professionals. If we invest in our true sense of being, we stand a better chance of becoming better professionals who understand that service delivery isn't more about the provision of services, but more being of service to those we provide services", Covenant concluded. Q



SMUs Technology Transfer Office scoops the SARIMA Excellence Award

The Southern Africa Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) is an organisation that promotes and supports professional development of Research and Innovation Management in the SADC region. It provides a platform for the promotion and facilitation of best practices in research and Innovation. SARIMA holds annual conferences during which achievements and progress made in enhancing the research and innovation by member institutions and professionals are recognized through awards in specific areas of research and innovation.

SMU, as a member of SARIMA, submitted, through the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) office, progress made with regard to innovation management at the university. The entry highlighted the following initiatives by the TTO;

- Securing of close to R2 million funding from the Technology Innovation Agency's (TIA) Seed Fund in support of innovative projects, including further development of SMU's first registered IP;
- Joining a consortium of 13 research institutions and contributing to the development of guidelines for the Deep Tech Venture Builder (DTVb), an initiative aimed at mobilizing resources for commercialization of technological invention from research projects. To this end, SMU has already submitted five potential technologies into the DTVb pipeline of technologies.

SMU is one of only two (2) institutions in the country which were selected to participate in the World Intellectual Property Organisation's "On The Job Training" (OTJT) for Tech Transfer Managers in 2023.

"We really are grateful to the SMU research community without whose consumption of our services and administrative support, these efforts would not matter. The SARIMA 2024 Excellence Award for Organisational Growth in Innovation Management awarded to SMU is a recognition of efforts by our peers in the SADC region in advancing Innovation Management", concluded TTO Acting Manager, Mr Mohlatlego Sebola.



SMU Research Days 2024: Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship



Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) held its annual Research Days programme From August 21 to 23 2024, with the theme, *"Research in Motion: Moving Beyond Publications to Innovation and Entrepreneurship,"*. The main objective is to highlight SMU's dedication to promoting research that extends beyond academic contribution, aiming to drive real-world innovation and entrepreneurial ventures.

The three-day event was vibrant, featuring poster and oral presentations from approximately 130 researchers. Participants included undergraduates, postgraduates, postdoctoral fellows, and independent researchers from various departments within the university. The event offered an interactive platform where audience members actively engaged with the presenters, posing insightful questions and sparking stimulating discussions that enriched the dialogue.

The keynote speaker was Prof Rubin Pillay, who is from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), where he leads health-related innovation initiatives for the School of Medicine

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and the Health System. With over 28 years of experience in healthcare as a clinician, academic, leader, and innovator, he applies creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship to transform health and healthcare in the digital age. He is also the founder and president of the American Health Innovation Academy and The Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Health. The title of his presentation was The AI Revolution in Health Care.

The key issues discussed at the event, included, amongst others, the following:

- Research commercialisation: A practical approach.
- Harnessing Research for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.
- Behavioral Change in Higher Education looking and Innovation and Entrepreneurship.
- Prof. Muhammad Hoque is a visionary, who is passionate about solving complex problems.
- The impact of Interdisciplinary Collaboration on Research and Innovation.

Several presenters reflected deeply on the theme of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, offering innovative ideas on how SMU can further empower entrepreneurship within the realm of research. These presentations underscored the importance of integrating entrepreneurial thinking into academic research, proposing ways to transform research findings into tangible, real-world applications. Some researchers leaned heavily towards innovation, presenting groundbreaking ideas with the potential to drive significant change in their respective fields.

The highlight of the event was the SMU Research Awards Gala Dinner, held on Friday 23rd August, where winners

from each category were announced and honored with certificates and trophies.

The awardees for the SMU Research Days 2024 were as follows:

Best Poster Presentation:

- **3rd Place:** Molebaloa AH, Pharmaceutical Sciences
- **2nd Place:** Mhlongo LN, Anatomical Pathology
- **1st Place:** Prof Meyer JC, Department of Public Health Pharmacy and Management
Research Topic: "Why are there persistent vaccine shortages at South African public sector health facilities?"

Undergraduate Students:

- **3rd Place:** Mmethi LM, Department of Anesthesiology
- **2nd Place:** Malada W, Practice of Medicine
- **1st Place:** Nkosi N School of Medicine, Department of Radiography
Research Topic: "knowledge, perceptions and practices of radiation safety among the final year medical and nursing students at a tertiary institution in Gauteng"

Oral Presentation - Postgraduate Students:

- **3rd Place:** Dlamini GN, Microbiological Pathology
- **2nd Place:** Vambe SD, Clinical Department, School of Pharmacy
- **1st Place:** Mamabolo MP, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences
Research Topic: "The metabolites' profile and effects of *Carpobrotus edulis* and *Tulbhagia violacea* on *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*."

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Oral Presentation - Postdoctoral Fellows:

- **2nd Place:** Dr. Gomwe H
- **1st Place:** Dr. Naidoo TM, Department of Biology, School of Science and Technology
Research Topic: "Biosynthesis, characterization, and bioactivity of silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) using *Tabernaemontana ventricosa* extracts."

Independent Research:

- **3rd Place:** Seabelo R, Clinical Psychology, School of Medicine
- **2nd Place:** Khaba MC, Anatomical Pathology, School of Medicine
- **1st Place:** Dr. Musyoki AM, Microbiological Pathology, School of Medicine
Research Topic: "Perception of disease severity drives willingness for cholera vaccine uptake: evidence from a COVID-19 surveillance cohort."

SMU Research Days 2024 was not only a testament to the university's commitment to academic excellence but also a catalyst for inspiring future innovations and entrepreneurial endeavors within the research community.🔍





Financial sustainability at the heart of the Academic project

In 2017, a need arose for SMU to establish a central Grants Office, charged with the responsibility to coordinate the conceptualisation of funding proposals for submission to DHET for earmarked funding, to monitor the implementation of approved projects and report to the DHET on an annual basis.

The Office, reporting to the Chief Financial Officer has grown from two staff members in 2017 to the current complement of six staff members. At the centre of its operations is the management of the following grants:

- Clinical Training Grant (CTG)
- University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP)
- Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme (SB-DP)
- New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP)
- Foundation Provision Grant (FPG)
- Report and control of the Infrastructure and Efficiency Grant (IEG)

Contributing about 10% of total revenue at SMU, altogether, these grants attract budget allocations amounting to almost R200 million per annum (excluding IEG) and, following the principle of “efficiency in utilizing public funds to obtain goodwill” grants have provided a cushion in saving the Council-controlled funds as well as growing our 1st stream income, which otherwise is going down in many an institution.

The impact of the grants reverberates throughout the walls of SMU as many academic and support staff members in clinical programmes get their remuneration from the CTG, and so does the procurement of exorbitant clinical training equipment. There are programmes/departments that run

almost entirely on CTG funding, including the Skills Centre and the Practice of Medicine (POME). As an illustration, recently, the Department of Nursing launched its Midwifery Unit also funded through the CTG. It is a well-known fact that SMU is one of the few institutions that transports students to clinical training platforms. This is made possible by the CTG.

Working collaboratively with the Centre for University Teaching and Learning (CUTL), the Student Affairs and the Research and Innovation Directorates, the UCDG Plan has eight projects running for the next three years aimed at enhancing the student experience, funding academic staff to attain Masters and PhDs, developing the capacity of staff as researchers and university teachers, and reimagining the curriculum for the 21st century world.

The New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) is one of the flagship programmes. SMU started participating in Phase 2 in 2016 with two academics who have since completed their PhDs in Nursing and Public Health. Another academic staff member has completed her PhD in Anatomy. The others joined the University after that. Currently, the University has 17 nGAP staff members at different stages of their PhD or postdoctoral study. It is with great pride that SMU participates in this programme, to contribute to transformation of the academia in the sector as 84% of the nGAP academics are women and 81% are Black, but also to build a pipeline of scholars and young academics to take the University to the next generation of knowledge production and scholarship.

Named after the first Minister of Education in democratic South Africa, there is the Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme (SB-DP), which was established for the benefit of

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historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs), of which SMU is one. The SMU Plan on the SB-DP has 17 approved projects for the next 5 years amounting to more than R300 million, released by DHET in tranches on an annual basis.

These projects will provide the University with the much needed resources to establish new strategic units, expansion of the PQM, procure high-performance laboratory equipment, refurbish infrastructure, including clinical training platforms, install ICT infrastructure in the student residences, etc.

The University also participates in the expansion of student access to higher education with success through the FPG. Students admitted through the extra-curricula programmes proceed to access mainstream degree programmes.

The Grants Office prides itself on achieving clean audits submitted to DHET in the past six years and the work of this Office has been acknowledged by DHET. In addition, SMU has a 99% success rate in DHET approval of proposals submitted for funding over the same period. It was this achievement that led DHET to appoint SMU to host and administer three sector wide support programmes, amounting to more than R150

million. This has given SMU an appreciation of sector wide challenges but also attracted third stream income for the University in management fees.

Becoming a sector wide example of good practice, the SMU Grants Office has been instrumental in the conceptualisation and staff recruitment of similar offices in other universities, e.g. University of Venda, University of Fort Hare and University of Limpopo.

The University has derived benefits from the establishment of the central Grants Office. The university has achieved integrated planning (funding of projects across different grants), streamlined processes in applying for funding and reporting and efficient allocation of resources.

The Grants Office has since experienced substantial growth with regard to budget, operations, financial impact, and more importantly, impact on the academic project in respect of the following:

- Capital Projects,
- Operational commitments,
- Salaries for many academic and support experts, and
- Specialised equipment.



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SMU Staff Shine at the 2nd Annual Prof Mokgalong Staff Sport Games

Staff sports play a crucial role in promoting health and well-being in the workplace. Engaging in regular physical activity through sports helps to reduce stress, increase energy levels, and improve overall productivity. Moreover, events such as the Prof Mokgalong Staff Sport Games foster a sense of unity and teamwork among employees, which translates into better collaboration and communication in the workplace. These initiatives contribute to a positive work environment and help build a sense of belonging among staff members.

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Staff Sport team participated in the second, Annual Prof Mokgalong Staff Sport Games, held on 24 August 2024 at the University of Limpopo, Turfloop Campus. The event brought together staff from various organisations, providing a platform for camaraderie, sportsmanship, and healthy competition. The tournament featured the following teams:

- University of Limpopo (UL)
- Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU)
- University of South Africa (UNISA)
- South African Police Services – Provincial (SAPS)
- National Department of Correctional Services (NDCS)
- Polokwane Local Municipality (PLK)
- Road Agency Limpopo (RAL)
- Limpopo Economic Development, and Department of Social Development (LEDET)

- National Department of Public Works and Infrastructure
- Limpopo Economic Development, Environment and Tourism
- Corporate Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGSTA)
- UL Alumni and Convocation (ALUMNI)
- Polokwane Corporate (BMW, VW, Standard Bank, Mercedes Benz)

The SMU Staff Sport Association (SMUSSA) teams showcased their skills and determination across various sporting codes, which include Aerobics, Darts, Football, Netball, Supa Pool, and Volleyball. The teams demonstrated outstanding sportsmanship and dedication, achieving remarkable results.

Supa Pool Champions

The Supa Pool team emerged victorious, claiming the championship title after a hard-fought series of matches. They defeated the hosts, UL, in the much-anticipated final.

Netball Team Achievements

Our netball team also put up a strong performance throughout the tournament, ultimately securing the silver medal after a challenging final against UL. Their determination and skill were evident in their match results.

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Volleyball Team Efforts

The volleyball team had an impressive run, advancing to the finals before falling to the hosts, UL. Their performance showcased their dedication and talent.

Darts Team Performance

The darts team faced stiff competition and, despite their best efforts, finished in the fourth position. Their commitment to the game was commendable, and their participation added to the event's overall excitement.

Football Team Highlights

The football team competed fiercely in the tournament but did not advance beyond the group stages.

Join the SMU Staff Sport Association (SMUSSA)

SMUSSA provides an excellent platform for staff members to demonstrate their sporting talents and engage with colleagues from various organisations. This does not only highlight the importance of physical fitness but also foster a spirit of teamwork and unity. We invite all SMU employees to join the SMU Staff Sport Association (SMUSSA) and become part of this vibrant community. To join, please contact our office to get a membership form at poeletso.tlaka@smu.ac.za.

Together, let's continue to build a healthier, happier, and more connected SMU community through the power of sport! 🔍





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