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Dintshang

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THE TRAILBLAZERS EDIT

An inspiring edition featuring the trailblazing stories of SMU students making waves in leadership, arts, sports, and social advocacy. From driving healthcare innovation to championing mental health and disability awareness, this edition celebrates their incredible impact on society. Immerse yourself in inspiring tales of passion and perseverance that embody SMU's commitment to nurturing leaders who transform the world beyond the classroom.

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Editor's NOTE



Dear Reader,

With immense pride and joy, I welcome you to this edition of Dintshang, The Trailblazers Edition, a celebration of the extraordinary achievements of SMU students who are making waves not only in their respective fields but also in society at large. This edition highlights the stories of students leading with passion, creativity and purpose in leadership, arts, sports and social advocacy. It reflects the essence of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) as an institution committed to shaping well-rounded students, nurturing them beyond the classroom to become changemakers in the world.

The theme for this edition, Trailblazers, is a fitting description of the unique paths SMU students are forging. These are individuals who, through hard work and dedication, are breaking new ground in leadership, arts, sports and advocacy—fields that are vital to shaping society's future. From inspiring leaders and advocates addressing critical issues like mental health and gender-based violence, to artists and creators redefining their crafts, SMU students and alumni continue to showcase their brilliance and courage.

One such story is that of Samuel Chauke, crowned Mr World South Africa, who uses his platform to advocate for individuals living with disabilities and raise awareness on mental health. His journey is a powerful reminder of how SMU empowers its students to not only excel academically but to become compassionate leaders addressing societal challenges. We also highlight Phomelelo Rammutla, one of SMU's youngest graduates, who has already begun making an impact in

the field of oral hygiene, representing the next generation of health professionals shaping South Africa's healthcare system.

As we take pride in SMU's recent milestone of breaking into the Top 10 of the World University Rankings, this edition reflects the very heart of what makes our university exceptional. At SMU, we do more than provide quality education—we are deeply invested in nurturing students with values of integrity, empathy, and leadership, ensuring they leave a mark wherever they go.

In this jam-packed edition, you'll find stories of resilience, creativity, and impact. Whether it's through leadership roles, advocacy initiatives, or their work in the arts, these students are true trailblazers. I hope their stories inspire you, as they have inspired me, to continue striving for excellence and making a difference in your own communities.

I invite you to read this edition with pride and appreciation for what we, as the SMU community, have achieved. Together, we are building a legacy that will inspire generations to come.

Here's to celebrating the trailblazers of SMU.

Enjoy!

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SMU breaks into top 10 of THE World University Rankings

In a groundbreaking achievement coinciding with its 10th anniversary, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) has solidified its position as one of South Africa's leading higher education institutions by securing the 10th spot in the prestigious Times Education (THE) World University Rankings 2025. This accomplishment marks a new era for SMU, showcasing its rapid ascent within the competitive field of health sciences, signalling its growing influence on the global stage, and cementing the university's status as a health science powerhouse.

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SMU's rise in the rankings comes hot on the heels of its impressive performance in the 2024 Webometrics Rankings, where it placed 18th nationally. Now, having cracked the top 10 in the most prestigious and competitive university rankings, SMU is positioned as a dynamic and influential force in higher education. This remarkable achievement is especially notable as SMU competes against long-established institutions, further underscoring the impact the university is making within a relatively short time.

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025 evaluated more than 2,000 institutions from 115 countries, employing a comprehensive methodology that includes 18 finely tuned performance indicators. These criteria assess universities across key areas such as teaching, research quality, industry engagement, and international outlook, making the rankings one of the most respected measures of global academic performance. Professor Bassy Marvey, SMU's Director of Institutional Planning, attributes this success to the university's strategic focus on raising its local and global visibility and reputation. "This remarkable achievement, coinciding with our 10th anniversary, reflects the collective dedication of our staff and students. Their commitment has propelled SMU into the ranks of the nation's best universities. We are also grateful for the dedication of our Institutional Researcher, Ben Ntshabele, whose ongoing collaboration with ranking bodies contributes to such accomplishments," says Marvey.

SMU's success extends beyond the general university rankings, with standout performances in subject-specific rankings. Nationally, SMU ranks 7th in Medicine and Dentistry and other health-related subjects and

8th in Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Computer Science, and Psychology. On the global stage, SMU is placed in the 1201-1500 band, sharing the spotlight with leading institutions such as the University of South Africa and the Durban University of Technology.

The university's rise in the rankings was further celebrated by Dr Nobuhle Nkabane, the Minister of Higher Education, who praised SMU for its exceptional progress during a speech delivered at the 3rd Higher Education Conference, organised by Universities South Africa (USAf). "I am delighted to see two newcomers in the rankings—Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, led by Professor Peter Mbaty, and the University of Fort Hare under Professor Sakhela Buhlungu. Congratulations to both institutions for their remarkable achievements," said Nkabane.

As SMU continues to grow its reputation in health sciences, this milestone reflects its commitment to pioneering innovation in healthcare education and research. With a student-centred approach and a focus on global excellence, SMU is rapidly carving out its place among the world's most respected universities, a point of pride for its students, staff, and alumni.



SMU is positioned as a dynamic and influential force in higher education.

Mudzunga Ratshilingano

scoops Dean's Merit Award for Academic Excellence

In a remarkable display of academic prowess, Mudzunga Ratshilingano, a Bachelor of Science (Life Sciences) graduate from Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), has been honoured with the prestigious Dean's Merit Award from the School of Science and Technology during the recent Autumn Graduation Ceremony. This esteemed accolade recognises students who exhibit exceptional academic achievements, further highlighting SMU's commitment to fostering excellence in its graduates.

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Receiving the Dean's Merit Award brings numerous advantages, including enhanced credibility, increased opportunities for scholarships, and recognition by employers and academic institutions. For Ratshilingano, this award is a testament to her hard work, discipline, and dedication to her studies. "The award serves as a motivation to continue striving for excellence in everything I do. It was a surprise, as I always focus on my goals without expecting recognition," she shares.

A series of significant achievements have marked Ratshilingano's academic journey. She previously received accolades as the top achiever in her degree programme in 2022 and was again recognised as the top achiever in her second-year studies in 2023. Graduating in 2024 with cum laude, her success illustrates the quality education and support offered by SMU, which equips students with the necessary skills to excel in their fields.

Throughout her degree, Ratshilingano engaged with modules such as physiology, biology, and biochemistry, which deepened her understanding of the human body and the complex interplay of microorganisms and chemical processes. "My degree has empowered me to write research papers and conduct scientific inquiries," she explains, reflecting on her educational experience.

She also credits her success to the invaluable teamwork skills gained during practical sessions and her unwavering faith. "My trust in God gives me the strength and courage to overcome challenges, including academic burnout. I found taking breaks and engaging in hobbies essential to maintain balance," she adds.

To fellow students grappling with academic pressures, she encourages regular attendance at lectures to enhance their understanding of the material. "If possible, engage actively in your studies and don't hesitate to seek help," she advises, embodying the spirit of support and perseverance fostered within the SMU community.

Ratshilingano's triumph highlights her individual capabilities and reflects the enriching educational environment at SMU, where students are inspired to excel academically and personally. As she embarks on her next chapter, she is a shining example for her peers, demonstrating that success is within reach with dedication and hard work.



“My philosophy as an oral hygienist is that every day is an opportunity to save teeth, restore smiles, and bring back confidence to people.”

SMU graduate earns Bachelor of Oral Hygiene at just 20

In a testament to Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University's (SMU) commitment to shaping South Africa's health services, Phomelelo Rammutla, at just 20 years old, has earned her Bachelor of Oral Hygiene degree, emerging as one of the university's youngest graduates of 2024. Her achievement highlights her dedication and the pivotal role SMU plays in developing exceptional health professionals who will strengthen and advance the nation's healthcare system. Through its focus on academic excellence and comprehensive support, SMU continues to produce graduates equipped to meet the growing needs of South Africa's health sector.

Rammutla's interest in oral health began at the young age of six when representatives from Colgate visited her primary school, Mogoshi Primary, in Ga-Matlala. "They gave us pamphlets about teeth brushing guidelines, which I kept until 2021. That small pamphlet ignited my dream of becoming a dental professional, and it constantly reminded me of a future in oral hygiene," she recalls.

Today, Rammutla works as an Oral Hygienist at Tshepang Medical Centre in Lephalale, where her duties include conducting preventative procedures, such as teeth cleaning and fluoride treatments while educating patients on maintaining good oral hygiene. "My philosophy as an oral hygienist is that every day is an opportunity to save teeth, restore smiles, and bring back confidence to people. It's also an opportunity to educate others about the link between oral health and general well-being," she shares.

Her path to success was not without its challenges. In 2020, she applied to SMU after hearing about the university from her peers. "When I discovered SMU had rebranded from the famous Medunsa, I knew it would be the perfect place to fulfil my dreams. I had offers from other institutions, but SMU felt like home," she explains. The academic staff at SMU, known for their dedication to nurturing the next generation of health professionals, guided her every step of the way, ensuring that she received the education, support, and training necessary to thrive.

However, as a 16-year-old entering university, Rammutla faced challenges adjusting to campus life. "I struggled with forming friendships and fitting in. Some people even said I should go back to high school. But eventually, I adapted and was able to blend in with my classmates," she notes. Despite these difficulties, and facing financial struggles along the way, including periods without food allowance or settled tuition fees, she remained focused on her studies and graduated with flying colours.

Rammutla's success also highlights the pivotal role SMU plays in producing graduates who are not only technically skilled but also instilled with the values of professionalism, integrity, and discipline. "SMU taught me that there is a time for fun and a time to focus. The discipline instilled in me by the university will carry me throughout my career. I'm proud to be an SMU alumna, and I'll always be grateful for the opportunity the institution gave me," she says. Her journey is further supported by the strong family foundation provided by three generations of women in her life: her mother, Delia Rammutla; her grandmother, Francina Rammutla; and her great-grandmother, Masetsha Kgomo. These women have been her pillars of strength, offering her love, guidance, and encouragement throughout her academic and personal life.

As Rammutla embarks on her professional journey, she continues to inspire others with her determination, resilience, and commitment to making a difference in oral health. Her story is a testament to the transformative power of education and the nurturing environment offered by Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, an institution committed to fostering student success and holistic development.

SMU continues to play a pivotal role in shaping future health professionals like Rammutla, reaffirming its status as a leading institution in the health sciences and a champion of student leadership, growth, and achievement.

New SRC President set to lead SMU towards greater student empowerment

In a remarkable turn of events at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Katlego Peter Moshanyane has emerged as the newly elected President of the Student Representative Council (SRC). His ascension to this pivotal role is not just a personal triumph; it embodies the spirit of resilience and determination that characterises the student body at SMU. With a compelling story rooted in defying adversity, Moshanyane is poised to be a transformative force, advocating for the rights and welfare of his fellow students.

Growing up in the small village of Cokonyane in Taung, his early life was marked by significant loss. The death of his mother when he was just in Grade 3 left a

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profound void, but it was his grandmother's unwavering support that steered him through the darkest times. "I have so much respect and love for her because I saw the sacrifices she made for my family and me," he shares, reflecting the humility and gratitude that define him today.

Moshanyane's academic journey has not been without challenges. Despite setbacks in his secondary education, including repeating Grade 10, he demonstrated incredible determination. After taking a year off to regroup, he enrolled at SMU, completing his Bachelor of Oral Hygiene in record time. But his ambition did not stop there; he has since embarked on a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) programme, where he is progressing through his fourth year.

His decision to run for SRC President was driven by his intimate understanding of the struggles faced by students, particularly around financial exclusion and housing instability. "I can't count how many students I have seen crying because of the challenges in institutions of higher learning," he reflects, voicing the pain that many students endure. This connection to his peers' challenges compelled him to step into a leadership role, determined to effect meaningful change.

Moshanyane's political journey began in 2018 when he sought to become chairperson of the School of Oral Health Sciences, an experience that laid the groundwork for his current success. "I literally voted for myself," he chuckles, reminiscing about the humble beginnings of his political career. Now, as SRC President, his vision is crystal clear: To amplify the student voice through open dialogues and student body meetings (SBMs), fostering an environment where every issue can be discussed and addressed.

sponsorships, ensuring that financially struggling students receive the support they need. "My vision is to see a stable university that can attract sponsors for students in need," he asserts, driven by a profound belief that every student deserves the opportunity to succeed.

Moshanyane's values of respect, authenticity, and bravery underpin his approach to leadership. He strives to cultivate a university culture that recognises and nurtures student potential, addressing pressing issues like funding, financial exclusion, and academic challenges. By working closely with academic staff and support services, he aims to create sustainable solutions that benefit the entire student community.

Beyond academics and leadership, Moshanyane enjoys playing soccer and cherishes life's simple pleasures, such as laughter and spending quality time with loved ones. His grandmother remains a central source of strength and inspiration, influencing his journey in profound ways. "O e tshwere mo bogaleng mosadi mogolo. Ke mo rata thata, ebile ke motlotlo tota ka ene," he expresses in Setswana, underscoring his deep love and respect for her.

As Moshanyane steps into his role as SRC President, he brings a wealth of personal experiences and an unwavering commitment to enhancing the student experience at SMU. His message to fellow students is encouraging: "I call on students to prioritise their academic activities since that is the route that will open doors for many. Additionally, prayer is mighty."

With him at the helm, the future of student leadership at SMU looks brighter than ever. His story is not just one of overcoming adversity; it is a testament to the strength of the SMU community, a place where resilience, dedication, and hope converge to create an environment where every student can thrive.

With a compelling story rooted in defying adversity, Moshanyane is poised to be a transformative force, advocating for the rights and welfare of his fellow students.

His leadership style is rooted in democracy, characterised by transparency and collaboration with both students and university management. He is fiercely committed to creating stable structures that attract

SMU graduates leading the way in healthcare advocacy and innovation

In the dynamic field of healthcare, young professionals are stepping up to shape the future of their respective fields, and graduates from Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) are leading the charge. The recent formation of the South African Young Pharmacists' Association (SAYPA) is a powerful example of this, with many of its executive members being SMU alumni. This trailblazing initiative reflects the outstanding quality of education at SMU and the university's commitment to nurturing leadership and advocacy beyond the classroom.

SAYPA was born out of a vision to create a unified platform for young pharmacists, allowing them to advocate for their professional development while addressing critical challenges within South Africa's healthcare system. SAYPA's focus is on empowering pharmacists to lead with purpose and professionalism, ensuring that the role of pharmacists in medicine dispensing and healthcare delivery is not only recognised but also strengthened.

A key driver behind this vision is the training and leadership experience that SAYPA's founding members gained during their time at SMU. "SMU equipped us with both a strong

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academic foundation and essential leadership skills," says Luyanda Khumalo. He explains that the university's focus on community health and public engagement instilled in them a deep sense of responsibility to effect meaningful change in the healthcare sector.

For SMU, this achievement is a testament to its legacy of developing healthcare professionals who are equipped with knowledge and prepared to lead and innovate. The university's holistic approach to education has consistently produced graduates who are making significant strides in various healthcare fields, demonstrating leadership, integrity, and a commitment to public service.

SAYPA's goals include providing young pharmacists with professional development opportunities, mentorship, and networking platforms. By tackling pressing issues such as unemployment and limited career advancement opportunities, SAYPA aims to empower the next generation of pharmacists to take charge of their careers while improving healthcare outcomes for all South Africans. The association is already engaging with healthcare employers, government agencies, and professional bodies to push for fair recruitment practices and advocate for better employment prospects for young pharmacists.

As SMU continues to shine on the global stage—recently breaking into the Top 10 of the World University Rankings 2025—its alumni are playing a pivotal role in advancing healthcare innovation and policy. SAYPA's founding members see their involvement in this initiative as an extension of the legacy that SMU has built, one that fosters leadership, advocacy, and social responsibility. "SMU's focus on collaboration across healthcare professions gave us a holistic view of how we can contribute to the broader healthcare system," says Khumalo. "This understanding has helped shape our

vision for SAYPA to ensure that pharmacists are at the forefront of healthcare solutions, improving access to medicine and patient care."

The formation of SAYPA is also an inspiring call to current SMU students, encouraging them to seize leadership opportunities within their fields. The founders believe that young professionals, including students still in training, can profoundly impact the healthcare landscape by being proactive, collaborative, and innovative. SAYPA's work serves as a beacon for aspiring leaders, showing them that they, too, can be catalysts for change.

The influence of SMU's alumni-led initiatives like SAYPA cannot be overstated. By offering support for such initiatives, SMU continues to play a vital role in bridging the gap between academic learning and professional practice, ensuring that its graduates are prepared to meet the challenges of the healthcare industry head-on.

"SMU has been instrumental in shaping me as both a pharmacist and a leader," says Khumalo, reflecting on the association's journey. "The university provided a world-class education and the mentorship and critical thinking skills necessary to lead in the healthcare sector. I'm proud to be an SMU graduate, and I hope our work at SAYPA inspires current students to dream big and take on leadership roles that drive positive change."

As SAYPA works to address broader healthcare challenges, including improving access to medication and integrating pharmacists more fully into primary healthcare services, it is clear that SMU's influence extends far beyond its campus walls. Its graduates are not only shaping the future of healthcare in South Africa, but they are also reinforcing SMU's reputation as an institution that nurtures leaders—leaders who are committed to making a lasting impact on the world.



Purpose-driven leadership:

Putting students' needs first

Keabetswe Molefe, a determined and visionary leader at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), has become a beacon of hope and resilience for the student body. Fondly known as "Chairman Kea," Molefe is currently pursuing his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) degree and has cemented his place as a passionate advocate for student rights and academic excellence.

Born in Letlhabile Township in North-West Province and raised in Ebony Park, Tembisa, Molefe's journey at SMU began in 2016 when he enrolled for a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy (BOccTher). His outstanding academic performance allowed him to transition to the highly competitive MBChB programme in 2019, a testament to his commitment to academic achievement. But Molefe's story extends far beyond his studies. His passion for student governance was ignited early on, and he has consistently worked to improve the welfare of his peers. "I am a young leader who believes in academic excellence and competent student leadership," he reflects. His leadership journey began when he served as Chairperson of the School of Medicine in the Student Representative Council (SRC) for 2022/23. Today, he serves a second term as Coordinator of the School of Medicine under the Interim Student Governance Structure (ISGS).

Molefe's leadership style is rooted in his ability to navigate complex challenges, always prioritising the needs of students. Under his leadership, the SMOSCI committee, a registered SRC structure, successfully secured significant student sponsorships, including financial workshops, Investec side bags, and scrubs. His dedication to safeguarding students' academic futures is evident

through his success in leading exclusion appeal efforts. "I have successfully won 100% of the academic exclusion appeals for 2024," Molefe shares proudly, highlighting his commitment to student success.

His fight against academic and financial exclusion has not been easy, often placing him in challenging spaces. "It has been a journey full of great experiences. You become adept at addressing issues with the necessary decorum, which helps shape your approach to leadership," Molefe remarks. This resilience and willingness to grow have made him a key figure in SMU's student governance.

In 2023, he had the opportunity to broaden his horizons on the global stage, participating in an African regional conference in Rwanda themed: "Embracing digital health in global health emergencies." This experience provided invaluable exposure, allowing him to engage in international dialogues and bring fresh perspectives back to SMU. It's a memory he continues to cherish as one of the most significant moments in his leadership journey. Molefe's leadership philosophy is founded on continuous learning, effective communication, and a deep understanding of university policies. He emphasises that successful student leaders must resist the pressure to win every battle. Instead, they should focus on collaboration, compromise, and educating both students and faculty members on the rules that govern university life. "You should not measure your success by solving all issues, but by understanding and working within the reality that students are not always right," he advised, urging future leaders to approach matters with fairness and realism.

In Molefe's view, meaningful change comes from a willingness to learn and foster respectful dialogue

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between students and university personnel. “The worst leader rushes to insult lecturers, assuming that the student is always right. Being real, learning, and striving for the best outcomes make a leader impactful,” Molefe emphasises.

Beyond his leadership roles, he inspires others with his remarkable balance of academic excellence and service. His story is a shining example of SMU's commitment to developing well-rounded student leaders capable of advocating for their peers and contributing to the university's growing reputation for excellence.

SMU has long been a place where student leadership and holistic development thrive, and Molefe's success is a testament to that tradition. His journey stands as an inspiration to current and future generations of students, reminding them that resilience, humility, and hard work are the keys to effecting meaningful change.

As SMU continues to shape the next generation of healthcare professionals, it is leaders like Molefe who will ensure that the student voice remains at the heart of the university's mission to empower its students and foster their development as future global leaders.



A leadership journey guided by light, faith and determination



Growing up in Nkowankowa Township, a few kilometres outside Tzaneen (Limpopo), SMU postgraduate student, Khanyisa Faith Mokgolobotho dreamt of achieving remarkable things and making a mark in the world of technology and leadership. Driven by the pursuit of better opportunities, her family moved to Soweto and later to Lenasia (Gauteng). She started schooling at Odin Park Primary School in Ennerdale (a predominately Coloured community) and then graduated and enrolled at Azara Secondary School (an Indian community). She credits these diverse communities for shaping her into who she is today: a Student Leader, Entrepreneur and Software Development Engineer.

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“My community was plagued by taxi violence and gang fights, which meant I didn't have many friends outside of school for safety reasons. This environment fuelled my determination to use education as my ticket out of this crime-ridden environment. From a young age, I was outspoken and confident, inspired by figures like former State President Jacob Zuma and Economic Freedom Fighter Commander-in-Chief Julius Malema. Their presence in politics and leadership fascinated me, and I knew from then that one day, I wanted to be a leader too,” says Khanyisa.

Leadership roles have always been a significant part of her life, and she set a goal of becoming a student leader when she registered to study for a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Mathematical Science at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) in 2020. “My leadership journey started as a Sports Officer of Residence 1B's House Committee in 2022, ultimately became a House Committee Chairperson in 2023, and eventually took on the role of Interim Student Governance Structure (ISGS) as the Residence Officer for the 2023/2024 term of office. These roles allowed me to make a tangible difference on campus and gave me the platform to advocate for my peers,” she shares.

In December 2022, she had an incredible opportunity to participate in the Data Intensive Research Initiative of South Africa (DIRISA) Student Datathon Challenge under the theme, 'using social media data to find innovative solutions.' The DIRISA student Datathon is a competition showcasing how open research data can be used to develop creative and innovative solutions to some of South Africa's problems. Its objectives include allowing students to learn about the benefits of open data(it gives undergraduate students an opportunity and exposes them to the world of data science), showcasing innovative

solutions using open data and data science techniques, finding new solutions to problems, and advocating for the use of open data. “I was among the first cohort of students to represent SMU, competing with students from different universities nationwide. My performance earned me the Best Female Student Participant award and a R100 000 annual bursary that funded the remainder of my undergraduate degree and my Honours in Computer Science and Information Science studies. This achievement did not just benefit me personally; it also opened doors for my fellow SMU Computer Science students. The Datathon has since become an annual event at SMU, encouraging more students to participate and develop their skills,” she emphasises.

She said that before switching to a BSc in mathematical science studies, she initially had ambitions of becoming a civil engineer, which led her to apply for a BSc in physical science. However, she made a switch after researching and reflecting on her goals. This path aligned more with her engineering aspirations, and she is proud to say that today, she is a Software Development Engineer, fulfilling her dream of becoming an engineer. The shift from civil engineering to software development was a journey of discovery and research, and she could not be happier with the outcome.

In July 2023, she took another leap of faith by joining the IM IN Ideation Programme for Women. Out of hundreds of applicants, she was proud to be among the top 150 selected to participate. She later graduated in April 2024 with the top 30 cohort as a female entrepreneur with a fully registered business. This programme, sponsored by JP Morgan, Telkom, and the Embassy of Ireland, was instrumental in helping her and co-founder Rosemary Erawemen of Techmed Connect Cloud Computing Machine Learning startup to the next level. They made it to the top 15 young female startups, a milestone she holds dearly.

She says: “I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to have been part of the "IM IN Ideation Program. It has equipped me with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to pursue my entrepreneurial aspirations in the tech industry with determination. I look forward to witnessing the continued impact of the 'IM IN Ideation Program' on future participants”.

Currently, she is employed as a Software Development Engineer at PyCentric PTY LTD, which she considers one of her most significant achievements. “My journey has been one of perseverance, leadership, and unwavering ambition. I am proud to say that I am a young black woman, an Entrepreneur, a Student Leader, and a Software Development Engineer. My name, Khanyisa Faith Mokgolobotho, is a testament to the light, faith, and determination that have guided me through every step of my journey,” she concludes.



Leading with purpose and impact

From the modest township of Tsakane in Gauteng to the halls of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Bongisizwe Sibeko—known by his peers as Bharaza—has charted a remarkable path of leadership, resilience, and growth. As a Bachelor of Science student, Sibeko's journey is a testament to the power of determination and the importance of an enabling environment like SMU, which nurtures young leaders to shape the future.

Sibeko's leadership journey began early, first as a class representative and later as the Chairperson of the Student Representative Council (SRC) School of Science and Technology (SST) Committee, a role he held for two terms. What started as a desire to inspire and uplift others evolved into a deep understanding of leadership's complexities. "Leadership is not about being perfect," Sibeko reflects. "It's about recognising that even your imperfections can be seen as strengths by others."

His tenure as Chairperson revealed the importance of belief—belief in oneself, belief in a vision, and belief in the possibility of transformation. "Believe before seeing," he explains, capturing a philosophy that has guided him through both the triumphs and challenges of leading a student body. This mindset

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has allowed him to face the pressures of leadership with calm confidence, teaching him that not every challenge demands a reaction and that patience is key.

At SMU, Sibeko found an institution that provided the platform and support he needed to thrive as a leader. Through an environment that fosters growth and self-discovery, SMU enabled him to explore his leadership potential and cultivate the skills necessary to inspire others. "Living a purpose to inspire is my greatest motivation," he shares a sentiment that captures his deep commitment to making a difference in the lives of those around him.

His leadership role taught him patience, the importance of small steps, and the value of persistence. "You can't win every battle," Sibeko acknowledges, but he has learned that progress often comes from consistent, steady efforts rather than quick victories. His journey from Tsakane to becoming a prominent leader at SMU serves as an inspiring example of what is possible with dedication and an enabling support system.

Sibeko's story is also one of personal growth. His leadership experience was not only about guiding others but also about discovering his own strengths and staying true to his values. "I may not be where I want to be yet," he admits, "but with consistent, small steps, even those who once ignored the difference will start to notice."

SMU's role in nurturing young leaders like Sibeko is pivotal. By providing a supportive environment where students can take on leadership roles, make mistakes, learn from them, and grow, the university demonstrates its commitment to empowering the next generation of change-makers. Sibeko's journey shows that leadership is not just a title but a process of continuous learning and self-discovery.

Sibeko's path from Tsakane to SMU illustrates the power of perseverance and the importance of an enabling environment that allows young people to rise, lead, and inspire. His story is a reminder that leadership is not confined to those born with it but can be nurtured in anyone willing to grow, learn, and take on the challenge. SMU continues to be a catalyst for this kind of personal and leadership development, empowering students like Sibeko to lead with purpose and impact.



SMU alumnus

Samuel Chauke crowned Mr World South Africa



Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) continues to prove its role in shaping students who become leaders committed to addressing critical societal issues. This time, the spotlight is on SMU alumnus Samuel Chauke, who was recently crowned Mr World South Africa (SA) for 2024-2026. Chauke will represent South Africa at the International Mr World competition in Vietnam from 5-23 November 2024, with a platform focused on promoting mental health awareness for men and advancing the rights of people living with disabilities.

Chauke's achievement illustrates SMU's ability to nurture not only exceptional health professionals but also societal leaders passionate about making meaningful changes in their communities. Graduating in 2018 with a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy, Chauke has already made significant contributions to the health sector. He currently serves as a Senior Occupational Therapist at Potchefstroom Hospital, where his work in vocational rehabilitation has transformed lives across the North-West Province. His passion for uplifting those often overlooked in society shines through his dual role as a healthcare professional and now as a national ambassador through Mr World SA.

Reflecting on his journey, Chauke credits SMU for instilling in him the values of compassion, resilience, and the pursuit of excellence. "SMU taught me that kindness, humility, and striving for greatness coexist," he says. "The support from my lecturers and peers helped shape me into who I am today."

But Chauke's path to success was not without its challenges. As a child growing up in Soshanguve, he had dreams of becoming a police officer or forensic pathologist, only to stumble upon the world of

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occupational therapy by chance. His university years were marked by personal struggles, including collapsing during final year exams due to exhaustion and a vote of no confidence in his leadership role as class representative. Despite these setbacks, he persevered, driven by his desire to succeed and the encouragement of mentors who saw his potential.

One such mentor reminded him of the heights he could reach, telling him he was not doing enough to unleash his full potential. "That conversation was a turning point," he recalls, "and it pushed me to aim higher, even when I doubted myself."

Chauke's foray into pageantry stems from his experiences as a healthcare provider. Witnessing the stigma faced by people living with disabilities and men struggling with mental health issues, he was inspired to create awareness and advocate for change. "I wanted to show the world that disabilities don't define individuals. They have potential just like anyone else," he shares. "As Mr World SA, my mission is to break down these barriers and help shape a society that sees the value in everyone, regardless of their challenges."

In addition to his work as a healthcare professional and pageant titleholder, Chauke is also passionate about fitness. Having been body-shamed in his youth, he transformed his confidence through fitness and established Showfitsam to inspire others. "Fitness is not just about physical health," he says. "It's about mental health too—taking care of yourself so you can be the best version of yourself."



Chauke's journey from SMU to the national stage demonstrates the profound impact of student leadership and holistic development fostered by the university. SMU is not just producing professionals; it is cultivating leaders who are committed to addressing some of society's most pressing issues, from gender-based violence to the mental health crisis. As Chauke embarks on his Mr World journey, he carries with him the lessons learned at SMU—kindness, leadership, and the drive to make a difference.

His story is one of perseverance, passion, and the belief that every person has the potential to inspire change. With his upcoming trip to Vietnam and his platform advocating for men's mental health and disability rights, Chauke is not just representing South Africa—he is representing the values and vision instilled in him by SMU, a university dedicated to shaping leaders for a better society.



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Cardiac abnormality fuels SMU student's rise from patient to medical pioneer

Boitumelo Tenda Nkuatsana, a fourth-year Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) student at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), embodies the spirit of resilience and innovation. Battling health challenges from a young age, Nkuatsana's passion for medicine is matched only by her entrepreneurial spirit, making her a shining example of the remarkable opportunities at SMU.

Born with a cardiac abnormality known as ventricular septal defect with aortic valve insufficiency, her childhood was marked by frequent hospital visits. However, these experiences also ignited her passion for medicine. "I spent my whole childhood in and out of the hospital, surrounded by medical staff whom I shadowed and volunteered with at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital and other local clinics," she recalls. "Medicine is all I have ever known, and I fell in love with it the first time I heard the clicking sound of my new heartbeat at five, following my heart surgery."

Nkuatsana chose to study at SMU after receiving a personal invitation from Driene Schoeman of the Practice of Medicine (POME), who highlighted the university's practical and patient-focused approach to learning. "Her words rang true, and I have loved every moment at SMU, even through the tough times," she affirms.

Despite her health struggles, she has successfully launched her own business, QUICK & SIMPLE WITH BOITY, catering specifically to the needs of her fellow students. Her entrepreneurial journey began with a simple need; a moment of hunger led her to seize an opportunity. "I once had just a 5L container of aachaar and a loaf of bread, and my residence mates kept eating my aachaar. I realised I could make money from it. The spirit of entrepreneurship runs in my blood," she explains. Today, her business adapts to seasonal demands, offering everything from aachaar and bread to drinks during exam season.

Her business not only allows her to thrive but also enables her to contribute to her family in Dobsonville, Soweto. Balancing her academic commitments with her entrepreneurial pursuits, Nkuatsana acknowledges the challenges of her chaotic schedule but credits the support of her friends for helping her manage stock and deliveries. "My earnings fluctuate based on my academic schedule, but I'm grateful for the assistance I receive," she says.

With a vision for her future, she aspires to achieve financial independence, aiming to cover her final year expenses, which include the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) registration and other graduation costs. Her long-term goal is to see her aachaar on retail shelves and to establish a business centre for fellow traders.

"Successful entrepreneurship requires effective communication, quality assurance, and the ability to



manage risks and customer expectations. You must be goal-driven and adaptable, as customer feedback can significantly impact your reputation," she advises. Beyond her entrepreneurial ventures, Nkuatsana also serves as the Chairperson of SMU Medics on Motion and is an active member of the SMU choir. A talented poet and songwriter, she previously performed with the Soweto Marimba Youth League, showcasing her versatility and creativity.

"Let your hunger be the reason you start, and let it fuel your perseverance. Patience is vital in business," she concludes, embodying the tenacity that defines not only her journey but also the ethos of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University—a place where students are empowered to dream, innovate, and succeed against all odds.



From
numbers
to makeup:
An inspiring
story of
a beauty
with brains

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) continues to foster holistic student development through its entrepreneurship programme, empowering students to unlock their innovative potential and take charge of their futures. One shining example of this is Koketso Malebana, a remarkable student from Atteridgeville who is balancing academic excellence with entrepreneurial success.

Malebana, pursuing a Bachelor of Science (BSc) Honours in Mathematics at SMU, discovered her passion for makeup artistry at fifteen. Growing up, she would watch her sisters, Kgothatso and Nomsa, apply makeup and ask about the products they used. This curiosity sparked a journey of self-taught skills, leading her to master the art of makeup. "I started by perfecting my eyebrows, and over time, I learned how to do full-face makeup," explains Malebana.

In 2022, driven by her passion and entrepreneurial spirit, she founded Kokiie's Beauty Artistry, a freelance makeup business that caters to clients of all ages. Her services are tailored to various occasions, from graduations and gala dinners to beauty contests and casual outings. Malebana's business thrives on the joy of making her clients feel confident and beautiful.

Beyond her passion, financial necessity played a role in her entrepreneurial journey. "Not having funding for my studies motivated me to start my business. I didn't want to constantly ask my parents for money, especially with the rising living costs. Running my business allows me to meet my daily needs and focus on my studies without worrying about where my next meal will come from," she shares.

Malebana's entrepreneurial drive is deeply rooted in her family. Her parents run a decor company, her sister Nomsa owns an environmental waste management business, and her other sister, Kgothatso, operates a

catering and decor company. This family legacy of entrepreneurship inspired her to venture into business while maintaining her academic ambitions. "Balancing my studies and business is important to me. I carefully manage my time, taking bookings during my free time or study breaks. Nomsa also helps with the workload when I have many clients," she adds.

Malebana actively markets her services within SMU to grow her business, leveraging residents' group chats and social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp. She is ambitious about the future, with plans to expand her beauty business to offer hair installations and nail services. She also dreams of becoming a data analyst or scientist, with aspirations to pursue advanced studies in mathematical optimisation. She credits SMU with shaping her into the

well-rounded individual she is today. She expresses gratitude to the university for instilling a sense of Ubuntu, acceptance, commitment, and time management in her. "SMU has taught me to manage my time effectively and balance my academic and business pursuits," she says.

Malebana's journey highlights the nurturing environment SMU provides for its students, encouraging them to excel both academically and personally. Through its entrepreneurship programme, SMU remains an institution of choice for students who aspire to achieve greatness across multiple disciplines.



Breaking barriers in bodybuilding: Redefining strength and femininity

Sonno Mohlala, a final-year Nursing and Midwifery student at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), is proving that strength and femininity can go hand-in-hand. She placed in the Ladies' Wellness under 166 cm category and emerged as the overall winner in the Ladies' Wellness division at the University Sports South Africa (USSA) Bodybuilding National Competition, recently held at North-West University, Vaal Campus.

Balancing the pressures of her demanding academic schedule with the rigorous training necessary for bodybuilding is no small feat. Mohlala succeeds in both by carefully managing her time and dedicating just one to two hours a day to her training while excelling in her studies. "By sparing an hour or two for the gym, I can balance both school and training effectively," she explains.

Her journey in bodybuilding has been one of transformation, not only physically but also emotionally. Mohlala admits that she struggled with low self-esteem before taking up the sport. "I wasn't comfortable in my own body until I started bodybuilding. Now, I see how unique and different I am," she shares, reflecting on the confidence the sport has given her.

SMU has provided the platform for Mohlala to excel both academically and athletically, demonstrating the university's commitment to enabling its students to pursue their passions beyond the classroom. Her success at the USSA competition has also earned her a spot at the national championships, where she finished in the top ten—a stepping stone towards her goal of placing in the top three next year.

But Mohlala's achievements extend beyond bodybuilding. She serves as the Manager for the SMU Ladies' Rugby Team, a role that highlights her leadership and mentorship skills. Although she does not play rugby herself, her involvement underscores her dedication to promoting women's participation in various sports. "Women fear they will look like men if they lift weights, but that's not true. You can be feminine in a muscular way. Don't let societal stigma hold you back," she advises, challenging the stereotypes that often discourage women from pursuing bodybuilding.

Mohlala's story is a testament to the empowering environment at SMU. The university not only cultivates academic excellence but also supports the diverse ambitions of its students. With the backing of her academic institution, Mohlala has redefined what it means to be strong, both mentally and physically.

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Her future goals are clear: she is determined to reach new heights in bodybuilding, aiming for victory in national competitions. She hopes to inspire more women to challenge societal norms and embrace the empowering effects of sports. “Bodybuilding is often seen as a men’s sport, but women are just as capable. I want to see more women taking part in sports. Bodybuilding helped me, and it can help others improve themselves,” she says.

Mohlala is more than a champion; she is a trailblazer. Her success illustrates the calibre of students that SMU nurtures—those who are not afraid to break barriers and redefine norms, proving that with dedication and the right support, anything is possible. SMU stands proudly behind students like Mohlala, enabling them to shine in all their endeavours.

Building a new generation of well-rounded and multi-talented students

At Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), students are empowered to excel in multiple arenas, from academics to creative arts and business. Boitumelo Makofane, a second-year Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology student, exemplifies this dynamic approach. As a skilled hip-hop dancer and co-owner of a popular food business, Makofane's journey reflects SMU's commitment to fostering student success inside and beyond the lecture halls.

As an athlete, he recently participated in the South African Sport Aerobics, Fitness & Hip-Hop Federation (SASAFF) Provincial and National Championships 2024. He exceptionally won first place in the Provincial Championships 2024 held at Gauteng under the Adult Hip Pop Duo category. After winning first place in the Provincial Championships, he qualified to participate in the National Championships 2024 held in Cape Town, where he won second place under the category of Adult Hip-Hop Duo.

"I joined SASAFF through the university. SMU Sports Officer Busisiwe Sijora and Coach Ignituous Moeletsi facilitated all the processes and registrations. My team and I have been competing at University Sports South Africa (USSA) and have won all the competitions we have attended. This led us to join the SASSUF through Coach Moeletsi, where we managed to win at the provincial and national levels. We were proud to win the Adult Hip Pop Duo category, and I believe the unique techniques and skills we showcased on the floor convinced the judges enough," explains the Champion.



His talent as a hip-hop dancer and choreographer elevated him throughout the years, and he arrived at where he is today as an athlete. He won first place at the USSA in 2018 and 2019 under Small Crew Hip Hop. In 2019, he entered the SMU Explosive Talent competition and won first place under the category of Trio Hip Hop. He continued participating at the USSA in 2023 and won third place under the small Crew Hip Hop category. On the other hand, the athlete is the

co-owner of Mr Marinade Chicken Dust, a cook-and-grill food eatery based in Ga-Rankuwa Zone 2, Pretoria, next to a car wash at Mmatsetla. Mafokane and his partner, Thabiso Makhubela, established the affordable food eatery business in 2022, and most of their clientele consists of SMU and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) students. Mafokane explains their business currently employs two students from SMU in response to job creation for youth.

He explains, "My love for business began in primary school when I was in Grade 4. I used to sell sweets to my classmates during lunch breaks. Initially, managing both the business and my studies was quite challenging, but we hired additional staff to improve productivity." Mafokane continues, "In the short term, my goals include targeting a diverse range of customers, including SMU and TUT students, as well as those from nearby colleges and universities across all TUT campuses and the University of Pretoria (UP). In the long term, I aspire to develop my business into a leading national franchise, akin to other well-known food outlets."

Makofane's achievements in athletics, the arts, and entrepreneurship reflect SMU's holistic approach to student development. By supporting and encouraging students to explore their passions beyond academics, SMU continues to foster a new generation of well-rounded leaders. With ambitions of growing his business and expanding his success in hip-hop dance, Makofane is a testament to the university's role in shaping versatile and driven students poised to excel in all areas of life.

SMU student wins at South African Dance Foundation Championships



In a remarkable display of talent and dedication, Lehlohonolo Mbongela, a fourth-year BSc Physiotherapy student at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), claimed the coveted title in the Adult Championship section at the South African Dance Foundation Championships recently held at the University of the Western Cape. This prestigious competition brought together the nation's finest dance sports athletes, and Mbongela's achievement is a testament to his commitment and the supportive environment fostered by SMU.

Balancing rigorous academic demands with an intense training schedule, Mbongela exemplifies the essence of what it means to be a student-athlete. "It's all about making time and having a schedule that works for you," he explains, underscoring the necessity of meticulous planning in achieving success. His preparations for the championship began a month prior, coinciding with the demanding period of mid-year exams. Undeterred, Mbongela ramped up his training following the exams, committing up to ten hours a day to perfect his skills. This comprehensive regimen included strength and agility workouts, flexibility training, and precise choreography refinement.

For many students, the fear of extracurricular commitments hindering academic performance looms large. However, Mbongela advocates for a proactive approach: "Always have a plan that makes it easier to balance sports and academics." His advice resonates with

those striving to find equilibrium in their student lives, offering a roadmap for success in both arenas.

Mbongela draws motivation not just from his own aspirations but from the collective ambition of those around him. "I am inspired by everyone striving to be the best version of themselves, regardless of the sporting code they choose," he reflects, highlighting the universal pursuit of excellence that drives him.

His triumph inspires fellow students, encouraging them to chase their passions relentlessly. "Focus on what improves your life and brings you happiness and fulfilment," Mbongela advises, a message rooted in his personal journey and one that aligns with the ethos of SMU.

Key to his success are the qualities of discipline, hard work, and a robust support network. His story embodies the spirit of perseverance, reminding all SMU students and beyond that anything is possible with dedication and a strategic approach.

Mbongela's victory at the South African Dance Foundation Championships transcends mere accolades; it is a powerful reminder of the potential within each individual to excel academically and personally. His journey is about winning and setting an inspiring example for others to follow, reinforcing SMU's commitment to holistic student development and excellence.

Taelo Maloka shines on and off field, excelling in academics and sports

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) continues cultivating well-rounded students who excel academically and in sports. Taelo Maloka, a third-year Bachelor of Science in Dietetics student, exemplifies the university's commitment to nurturing talent inside and outside the lecture halls. Not only is Maloka thriving in his studies, but he has also made his mark in competitive bodybuilding and rugby, showcasing the versatility and dedication of SMU students. His inspiring journey is a reflection of SMU's efforts to develop and support its students in pursuing excellence across all areas of their lives.

For Maloka, balancing sports and academics has never been an issue. "I dedicate my time to academics during academic hours and cover as much work as possible," he explains. "This way, when it's time for sports, I won't be worried that my academic work will suffer." He adds that reducing time on social media has been crucial in creating a flexible

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schedule that accommodates his academic and athletic commitments. Maloka follows a daily 1-hour, 15-minute bodybuilding routine, with rugby practice on Mondays and Thursdays and games on Saturdays. His structured schedule allows him to excel in both sports without compromising performance, maintaining the strength needed for rugby while sculpting his physique for bodybuilding.

Being a student is inherently demanding, and preparing for bodybuilding competitions during mid-year examinations presented a unique challenge. Maloka's training schedule involves three consecutive days of training, one day off, and another three days, usually in the afternoons. However, a significant setback occurred when he dislocated his shoulder playing rugby just a week before the USSA Bodybuilding Competition. Despite this, he braced himself, adapted his training, and was able to compete in USSA, where he got third place. Not one to be easily deterred, he remained steadfast on his goal to qualify for nationals, so he competed at Gauteng Sedibeng and got first place in Men's Physique U178 cm and won overall, which qualified him for IFBB South African National Champions, where he won. He is

currently the Men's Physique Champion U178 cm in South Africa.

Maloka shared the inspiration behind his passion for bodybuilding, saying: "What sparked my interest in bodybuilding was watching movies as a child. I saw superhero actors with sculpted physiques and told myself, 'I want to look like that.' I never liked being skinny; I always felt too small." He offers valuable advice to students interested in sports but worried about its impact on their academic performance. "Finding a balance between both is the best way to excel. Reducing time on social media and other distractions can create more opportunities to engage in sports." He emphasises that playing sports benefits the brain and body, enhancing concentration and overall academic performance.

Maloka's motivation stems from the desire to be one of the best athletes in South Africa. "Participating in a sport you are passionate about makes excelling inevitable," he says. He hopes his achievements will inspire other students to believe anything is possible with dedication and the right mindset.

As he nears the completion of his studies, he remains focused on his bodybuilding career. He's already

considering his next steps in the sport. "After completing my studies, I want to try to turn pro," he says. "If that doesn't work out, I'll dive into fitness modelling and see where it takes me."

The key to Maloka's success has been the firm support of his father, siblings, and friends. "They believed in me when I wanted to quit, encouraged me to keep going, and reminded me that every day I was getting one step closer to victory," he recalls. Their support was crucial in his journey, leading to his recent highest achievement.

Maloka's academic and athletic achievements demonstrate the value of balance, discipline, and a strong support system. SMU's role in providing an environment where students like Maloka can pursue their passions while excelling academically underscores the university's commitment to holistic development. As Maloka looks toward a future in professional bodybuilding, his story inspires all SMU students, proving that with dedication and the right mindset, success in academics and sports is possible. SMU remains proud of its students who continue to make their mark across multiple arenas, highlighting the university's influence in shaping versatile and accomplished individuals.





SEPHO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

SMU

Isaac Mafolo

claims
impressive
second place
at SASAFF
National
Championships



Isaac Mafolo, a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics student at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), has proven that excelling in academics and sports is possible and can lead to extraordinary achievements. Mafolo, alongside his dance partner Boitumelo Makofane, recently secured a remarkable second-place finish in the Hip Hop Duos Adult 18+ Years Finals at the South African Fitness Sport Aerobic Federation (SASAFF) National Championships. This impressive accomplishment highlights his talent and the enabling environment SMU provides for its students to thrive beyond the classroom.

Born and raised in Ga Maila Segolo, a small village in Limpopo, Mafolo's journey has been one of dedication and perseverance. His early education at Mphele Secondary School in Limpopo set the foundation for his academic career, and he eventually joined SMU to pursue a degree in Mathematics. While excelling in academics is challenging enough, Mafolo's passion for dance led him to balance his studies with intense training to prepare for national competitions.

He credits his success to careful planning and time management, allowing him to give equal attention to his academic responsibilities and dance practice. "I create a schedule that allows dedicated time for study and practice," Mafolo explains. His disciplined approach ensures that neither his academic work nor his passion for dance suffers. "Prioritising tasks and staying organised helps me ensure that my studies and my sport can flourish," he adds.

Preparing for the SASAFF National Championships was no easy feat. Mafolo recalls a strict training schedule, designed in collaboration with his coach, that demanded four days of rigorous practice each week. "Each session focused on improving specific skills and overall fitness," he shares, noting that this structured routine played a key role in his success.

Beyond his personal achievements, Mafolo hopes his story will inspire other students at SMU to embrace their passions while pursuing academic excellence. "Sports teach valuable life skills such as discipline, teamwork, and time management, which are beneficial in academics as well," he says. His journey highlights that sports and studies are not mutually exclusive, and with dedication and proper balance, they can complement each other.

A self-taught dancer, Mafolo's love for movement and music began without formal training. He learned by watching performances, experimenting with his style, and putting in countless hours of practice. His natural talent and passion for dance have driven him to success, and he encourages aspiring dancers to stay persistent and embrace their unique paths. "Whether you have formal training or not, what matters most is your passion and dedication. Dance is as much about expressing yourself as it is about mastering techniques," Mafolo explains.

Reflecting on his journey, he recalls one of his most cherished memories—performing at SMU's Got Talent in 2019 at the South African State Theatre. "That experience reminded me why I love

dancing and motivated me to continue pursuing it with even more passion," he says.

Mafolo also acknowledges the challenges he has faced, particularly overcoming self-doubt as a self-taught dancer. It was easy to compare himself to those with formal training, but over time, he learned to embrace his unique journey and focus on his personal growth. "I learned to embrace my unique path and focus on my growth rather than comparison; this mindset helped me to keep pushing forward," he shares.

Looking ahead, he hopes his achievements will inspire more students to get involved in sports and embrace the opportunities offered at SMU. "I hope my win will encourage others to pursue their passions with dedication and confidence," he says. His journey serves as a powerful reminder that with the right mindset, passion, and determination, students can succeed in both their academic and extracurricular pursuits.

Mafolo's story is one of balance, perseverance, and the belief that with discipline and adaptability, anything is possible. He embodies the values of passion and dedication, making him not just an outstanding student and dancer but also a role model for his peers. With SMU providing the support and platform for students like him to thrive, Mafolo's journey is a testament to what can be achieved when a university fosters an environment where students are empowered to pursue excellence in all areas of their lives.



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