SEFAKO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

FOCUS on SMU

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Meet Dr Esmey Moema

a newly appointed Operations Manager (OM) in the School of Science and Technology (SST)

The story of Dr Adelaide Dudu Shiba

Meet, Ms. Nontlaza Sizani,

the Deputy Chairperson of the SMU Council

Wife, mother & member of the Methodist Women's Manyano,

Meet,

Ms. Nontlaza Sizani, the Deputy Chairperson of the SMU Council

Ms. Nontlaza Sizani, the Deputy Chairperson of the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Council, is an exceptional leader whose career in commerce, accounting, and governance spans over two decades. Her profound commitment to ethical leadership, transparency, and long-term institutional success has made her an influential figure, not only within SMU, but across several key South African sectors.

Born and raised in Umtata (now Mthatha), Eastern Cape, Sizani's early academic journey began at the University of Transkei, now Walter Sisulu Univer-sity (WSU), where she pursued a Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com). After receiving a govern-ment bursary, she worked at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), but it was not long before her career ambitions took a decisive turn. Encouraged by her auditing lecturer, she resigned from her government position to join KPMG in 1992, marking the beginning of a distinguished career in accounting.

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Tumelo Moila
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Relebogile Mabusela
Writer

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Writer

Khanyi Nkosi
Intern

Musa Msibi
Intern

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

“By 1994, I had completed my Bachelor of Commerce Honours/ Certificate in Theory of Accounting (CTA) and was on the path to becoming a chartered accountant. Despite the rigorous challenges of the qualification process, I opted to pivot my career while continuing to build my expertise in finance and governance. My drive led me to Gobodo Incorporated; an emerging Black-owned firm, where I played a critical role in securing and leading key auditing projects, including a major contract with the Limpopo provincial government,” she recalls.

Sizani's career growth continued at Transnet, where she became the head of the Cash Management unit. Her leadership extended beyond finance, as she served as Chairperson of the Board of Transmed, a Transnet medical aid scheme. Her expertise saw her participate in significant international negotiations and complex financial deals, including structured finance arrangements for SAA aircrafts. She served on the boards of the National Heritage Council (NHC), Chairperson of the Department of Human Settlements' Audit Committee, where she consistently showcased her leadership and governance acumen.

In 2019, Sizani joined the SMU Council. This is the period she described as a "baptism of fire," which required immediate action to help stabilize the university. With a vision of seeing SMU thrive as a premier health sciences university, Sizani worked closely within Council to implement long-term strategies that focused on student success, infrastructure development, and financial sustainability.

Sizani's leadership style is marked by her calm, measured approach, and her deep belief in the power of dialogue. She often cites the Xhosa proverb, *“Yonke into ilungiswa ngokuthetha,”* which emphasizes the importance of communication in resolving conflicts. Her ability to listen, mediate, and guide discussions to meaningful outcomes has earned her respect among her colleagues, both within the Council and in her broader professional network.

In her role as Deputy Chairperson, she has been instrumental in supporting the Council Chair, driving governance initiatives, and contributing to the university's strategic direction. As Chair of the Membership Committee, Sizani ensures that the right talent is brought onto the Council, helping to shape the university's future leadership.

Despite the demands of her professional life, Sizani remains deeply connected to her faith and family. As a wife, mother, and member of the Methodist Women's *Manyano*, she balances her responsibilities with grace and a sense of purpose. Her personal story of perseverance, from her childhood in Libode, Eastern Cape, to becoming one of South Africa's foremost leaders in higher education governance, is a testament to her resilience and dedication.

“As I enter my term as Deputy Chair of SMU Council, which extends until July 2027, I remain focused on empowering the next generation of leaders and ensuring that SMU continues its journey toward academic excellence. My legacy is not only one of professional achievement but also of unwavering service and commitment to the transformation of South Africa's education and governance sectors,” she said.

For Nontlaza Sizani, leadership is about service, consistency, and creating a lasting impact through ethical governance and open communication; values that continue to guide her remarkable career.

Dr Sonwabile Ngcezu

set to drive innovation and excellence in medical physics at SMU

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) proudly welcomes Dr Sonwabile Ngcezu as the new Head of the Department of Medical Physics. Ngcezu joins SMU with an impressive career in the field of medical physics, bringing a wealth of experience, leadership, and vision to his new role. His journey into this field is a story of passion, dedication, and a commitment to advancing healthcare through innovation and research.

From an early age, Ngcezu's natural aptitude for mathematics and physics laid the foundation for his successful career. His fascination with these disciplines blossomed into a passion for applying scientific principles to medicine, ultimately leading him to enrol for an MSc in Medical Physics in 2003. During this time, he also undertook a medical physics internship at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital and the University of Witwatersrand, where he honed his skills and expanded his knowledge.

A defining moment in his career came when he was appointed Director of Medical Physics at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital. This role deepened his leadership abilities and required him to tackle significant challenges. Among these were navigating outdated equipment, managing the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic, and responding to the devastating fire that disrupted both clinical and academic services at the hospital. In the face of these obstacles, Ngcezu led his team in upgrading radiation therapy protocols, shifting from traditional 2D/3D conformal radiotherapy to advanced treatment techniques.

Reflecting on his journey, he highlights his fascination with the intersection of engineering, natural sciences, and medicine. "The immediate, tangible impact of medical physics on patients' lives drew me into this field," he says. However, over time, his role

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evolved into one of leadership, guiding teams and shaping the future of healthcare through innovation.

As he steps into his new role at SMU, his vision is clear. His top priority is to elevate the department's academic offerings by fostering a strong culture of research and innovation. He aims to prepare students to excel in the rapidly advancing world of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), equipping them with the skills and knowledge to lead in areas such as nuclear medicine, diagnostic radiology, and radiotherapy.

Ngcezu is also committed to aligning the department's mission with SMU's broader objectives of advancing knowledge, innovation, and community service. He aims to instil values of ethical practice, community-centred healthcare, and creative problem-solving—principles that resonate with SMU's commitment to producing professionals who uplift both the local and global health sectors.

Despite the growing demands of technological advancements and the challenges posed by high disease burdens, long patient waiting times, and staff shortages, Ngcezu remains optimistic. His goal is to ensure that the Department of Medical Physics adapts to these changes and leads the way in integrating cutting-edge research into the curriculum. He envisions a department where students and professionals are equipped to address both local and global healthcare challenges through interdisciplinary learning and collaboration with fields like engineering, biology, and computer science.

Moreover, Ngcezu places great emphasis on professional development and staff support. He is dedicated to creating an environment where both staff and students are inspired to excel. By providing access to the latest research tools and fostering a challenging yet supportive academic environment, he believes that SMU will continue to produce graduates who are technically skilled and ethical and innovative leaders.

"I am deeply honoured to join the SMU community as Head of the Department of Medical Physics. My vision is to build a department that excels academically and contributes meaningfully to the future of healthcare through innovation and ethical practice," he says.

Under Ngcezu's leadership, the Department of Medical Physics is poised to become a hub of innovation, research, and academic excellence, furthering SMU's commitment to advancing knowledge and training the next generation of healthcare leaders.

“Driven by a desire to excel in education and break the cycle of early marriage”

...the story of Dr Elizabeth Limakatso Nkabane-Nkholongo...

Dr Elizabeth Limakatso Nkabane-Nkholongo, a PhD graduate in Public Health from Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), has broken barriers both in her homeland of Lesotho and internationally. Born in the rural area of Liphakoeng Ha Dyke Mapoteng in the Berea district, she was raised by her grandmother in a community where early marriage for girls was the norm. However, her path took a different direction, driven by a desire to excel in education and break the cycle of early marriage.

Her educational journey is nothing short of remarkable. From an early age, Elizabeth embraced her birthname, *"Limakatso,"* meaning “miracles,” which her grandmother gave her after she was born on New Year's Day at 1 a.m. Her grandmother's affirmation that she was destined for greatness pushed her to excel in a male-dominated environment. Elizabeth became the first girl from her community to attend college, earn a university degree, and later achieve a master's and PhD.

Her latest academic achievement, a PhD in Public Health, focused on groundbreaking research titled *“Adaptability and Acceptability of Embodied Conversational Agents Using 'Gabby' Health Information Technology in Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health for Adolescent Girls and Young Women in Lesotho.”* This study explored the adaptation of the US-based conversational agent “Gabby” into a culturally relevant *App*, *“Nthabi,”* to educate young women in Lesotho about sexual and reproductive health. The *App* was designed to be accessible on smartphones, providing a non-judgmental and confidential space for users to increase their knowledge on different health topics.

Elizabeth's dedication to improving public health in her country does not end with her research. She leads Lesotho-Boston Health Alliance (LeBoHA), an organization that has earned international acclaim for its innovative approaches to healthcare. Under her leadership, LeBoHA became the first institution in Lesotho to receive programme accreditation for its Family Medicine postgraduate training programme.

She said, “This programme has dramatically improved the doctor-to-patient ratio in the country, particularly in rural areas. LeBoHA's achievements, including the construction of an academic centre and receiving multiple international awards, such as the United Nations (UN) Interagency Primary Health Care Award, underscore Elizabeth's commitment to transforming healthcare in Lesotho”.

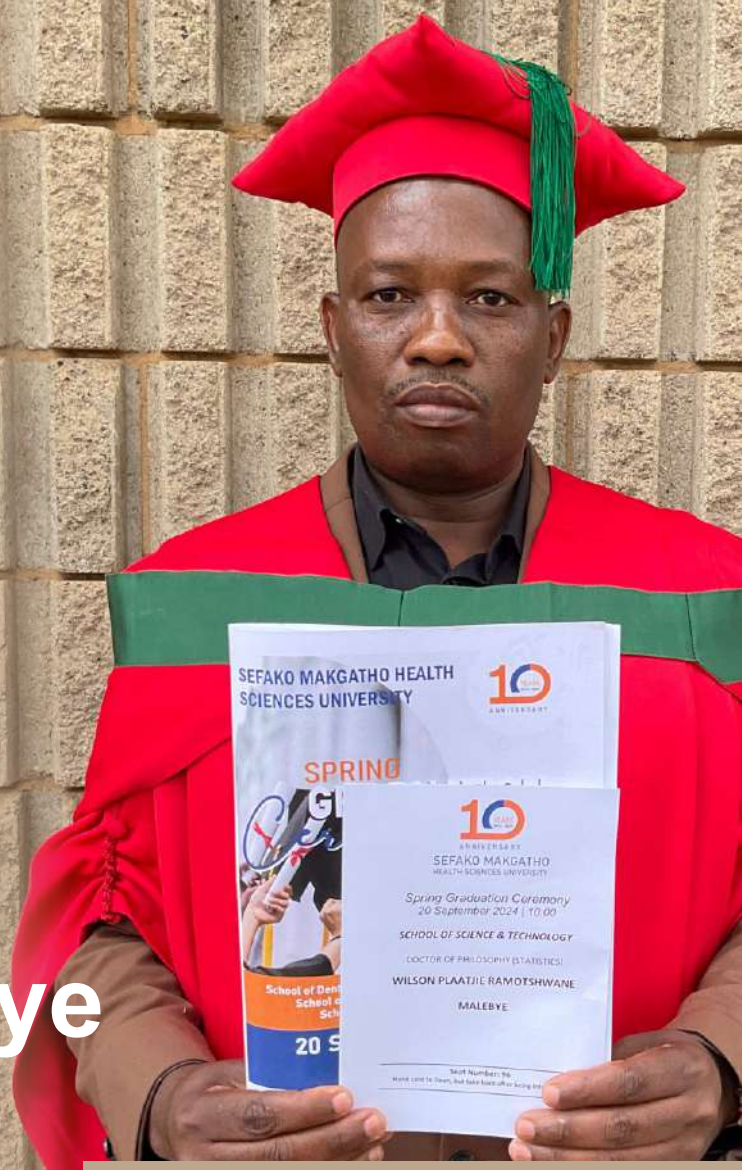
Elizabeth's leadership style is deeply rooted in participatory and compassionate approaches. She emphasizes teamwork, accountability, and nurturing the talents of her colleagues. This philosophy has helped her successfully navigate challenges, such as renegotiating staff contracts during financial difficulties and securing vital funding for LeBoHA's programmes from organizations like the Global Fund.

“As a strong advocate for using technology to bridge healthcare gaps, I see conversational agents like *Nthabi* as game-changers in sexual and reproductive health education. The tool addresses the challenges of limited healthcare resources and difficult terrain in Lesotho, making health education more accessible. My work represents a significant step toward revolutionizing healthcare in my country, particularly for young women who face cultural and societal barriers,” she advocates.

Dr Nkabane-Nkholongo's journey from a small village in Lesotho to earning a PhD and leading transformative health initiatives exemplifies resilience, innovation, and a deep commitment to improving public health outcomes. Her work continues to inspire and set a new standard for healthcare leadership in Lesotho and beyond.

“From selling wood to becoming a doctoral graduate”

The story of Dr Wilson Malebye



Born in the small, dusty village of Mmukubyane in the North West Province, Dr Wilson Malebye's story is one of perseverance, dedication, and passion for education. The second-born of three boys in a family where only his father, Victor Malebye, was employed, Wilson grew up with the values of hard work and resilience. His mother, Ruth, was unemployed and passed away in 2022.

Despite the challenges, Wilson's determination never wavered. While attending Thulare High School in Lebotloane, he earned extra money by selling wood to support himself, as his father's income alone could not cover all the family's needs. His elder brother, Darius Malebye, also shouldered responsibilities, working at Morula Sun to save money for higher education. With Darius's support, Wilson enrolled at Hebron College of Education in 1993, where he majored in Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry, completing his teaching qualification in 1995.

His career as a teacher began at Motswatemeng High School in 1996, and over the years, his hard work paid off. By 2009, he was appointed as the Head of the Mathematics and Science Department at Modiri High School in Ga-Rankuwa, where in 2011, he became the Deputy Principal at Hebron High School. Teaching has always been his passion, but Wilson's journey was just beginning.

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“In 1998, I took a bold step toward higher education, enrolling at the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA), now known as Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), where I pursued a Bachelor of Science degree, majoring in Mathematics and Statistics. My passion for Statistics grew, leading me to complete an Honours degree and later a Master's in Statistics. During this time, I also expanded my knowledge by earning a Btech in Project Management from Pretoria Technikon (now known as Tshwane University of Technology - TUT) in 2012,” he reminisces.

As his teaching career progressed, so did his involvement in the academic community. TUT recognized his expertise and appointed him as a Statistics Lecturer in 2014, where he continues to inspire students today.

The journey toward earning a PhD was filled with challenges, but Dr Malebye's resilience pushed him through. After facing several hurdles, he met his PhD supervisor, Dr Sam Ntuli, alongside co-supervisors Professor Solly Seeletse and Dr Marcus Motshwane, who guided him through the final stages of his research. In 2024, he completed his PhD with a dissertation titled *Perceived Stress, Coping Strategies, and Perception of Online Teaching Among Students at a University of Technology in Gauteng in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

His research provided insights into how university students navigated the sudden transition to online learning during the pandemic, offering a deeper understanding of the stressors and coping mechanisms employed by students during this unprecedented time.

Beyond his academic accomplishments, Dr Malebye remains dedicated to giving back to his community. Since 2006, he has been conducting Saturday classes for learners from Grades 8 to 12, assisting them in mastering Mathematics. His commitment to nurturing future generations goes hand-in-hand with his teaching philosophy.

"I believe that education should be interactive, engaging, and connected to real-world scenarios. In my statistics lectures, I carefully tailor my approach to meet the diverse learning needs of my students, incorporating real-life data, critical thinking exercises, and research-based assignments to foster a deeper understanding of statistical concepts. My mentoring style is rooted in collaboration, offering students guidance in developing research projects while emphasizing personal growth and academic success," he declares.

Dr Malebye's contributions to academia are far from over. He continues to explore innovative ways to enhance student learning, incorporating cutting-edge teaching methods and staying up to date with the latest developments in statistics. His future aspirations include increasing his role within the department, publishing more influential research, and expanding his mentorship efforts to help more students achieve their goals.

In both his professional and personal life, Dr Wilson Malebye exemplifies the values of perseverance, dedication, and community service, reminding us that education is not just about individual success, but about uplifting others along the way.

Walking 12km every day to and from school… Towards a doctoral Qualification

The story of Dr Adelaide Dudu Shiba

In the context of bullying at school being a significant contributor to mental health problems among children and adolescents, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Public Health, Adelaide Dudu Shiba, conducted her PhD research to investigate the nature and extent of bullying as well as its association with depression and anxiety among high school learners. She profiled bullying victims and perpetrators and explored the relationship between bullying behaviour, socio-demographic variables, and mental health outcomes among high school learners in Tshwane. Her findings indicated that victims of bullying display anger and frustration and often resort to bullying others who are perceived to be weaker than they are, which expands bullying behaviour and school violence.

"Anxiety, depression, and the home environment are strongly associated with bullying behaviour, and most learners who participate in bullying assume both the perpetrator and victim roles. Outputs from the study include a publication in an international journal, as well as one in a national journal," explains Dr Shiba.

Dr Shiba is the Director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at the National Department of Health, South Africa. She has more than 25 years of experience in the mental health field, initially clinically on the front line and later as a mental health programme manager at the district, provincial, and now at the national level. She has authored two peer-reviewed journal articles, co-authored one peer-reviewed journal article and a mental health chapter in the SA Health Reforms 2015-2020: *The Road Ahead* , as well as an article published in the South African Health Professions Council Bulletin.

Furthermore, she has presented two papers at SMU Research Days and presented a paper at the South African National AIDS Conference 2019. She led the project to develop the National Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan 2023-2030. She is a representative for the Department of Health in the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Mental Health established in terms of Section 71 of the Mental Health Care Act, 2002 of which she was instrumental in its establishment, and a representative for the Department of Health in the Health

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Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)'s Professional Board for Psychology.

> "My research area is on the population's mental health - strengthening health by adopting a public health approach to mental health. My niche is around strengthening the mental health and resilience of families, women, and children as this is what will contribute to a good life for all people. Mental health is central to the achievement of all sustainable development goals because mental well-being is a prerequisite for physical and social wellbeing and vice versa and is also a key factor in the development and maintenance of any economy and stability," she explains.

About her studies she said, "What challenges did I experience during my PhD studies? This is the question that makes me want to cry. My PhD supervisor, Prof KE Mokwena would narrate a story about my PhD challenges. First of all, being a single parent, with a very demanding job, a head of a household, a big sister to many, aunt to many, and daughter to many, it was not easy. COVID-19 threw another spanner in the works in my already challenging study journey. I had just started my PhD journey in 2019, and the country was closed in 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19. Those who could, resorted to virtual data collection, I could not. That was not an option for a school children research population," she remembers vividly.

She further said focusing on the area of mental health also made it more of a solo journey as not many people are focusing on this area, at least not until recently when an increased recognition and interest in this area is steadily becoming evident. The COVID-19 lockdown also delayed the process of her study ethics approval for a year which also brought in some frustrations. When the restrictions were relaxed a bit in 2021, it was still not business as usual. The permission was strict in that only one person would be allowed entry to collect data and in some schools, even that was not allowed. It meant she could not make use of research assistants, but had to collect the data alone.

She also said out of all the challenging things she has gone through in her life; PhD is among the top. She can write a book about all the challenges, including a life where it became normal that she did not sleep for more than 4 hours a night to a point where even now she is still working towards being able to sleep for the recommended 8 hours per night. Even when it was announced that she had passed her PhD, and she would graduate, she could not believe it until graduation day, *"Bengizwile yoh!* But what I can say is that it is possible. I did it having started at the age of 50 years and did it at 5 years. It is a very tough and yet remarkably interesting and rewarding journey. You come out a better person, with a more open mind that reasons more scientifically, and more logical" explained Dr Shiba, whose kids and family understood her PhD journey and gave her full support.

Born out of wedlock to young parents, Dr Shiba faced all the challenges that such children face, including, among others moving in between parents, having everybody claim her and having many homes. She was born in the outskirts of Ndwedwe at Montebello Mission in KwaZulu-Natal as her mother's first child. She started school as a little 5-year-old girl who had to walk 12km every day to and from school. She did well at school and eventually passed her matric at Amanzimtoti College of Education, Adams Mission in KwaZulu-Natal and completed her four-year Comprehensive Nursing Diploma with Lebone Nursing College and the University of Pretoria. She is a registered professional nurse with a BA Cur Degree in Nursing Sciences (UNISA), a BA Degree in Health and Social Services (UNISA), and a Master's in Public Health (MPH) from SMU and graduated with her PhD in Public Health in May 2024 (SMU).

"I do not remember a time in my life when I stayed without studying anything except when I was pregnant or nursing a baby. I gave birth twice to a boy and a girl, Melvin, and Michele but I am a mother to four kids, as my stepdaughter Nontobeko and my late sister-in-law's daughter, Bongiwe are also my kids. I am a woman who became a widow at the age of 32 years with her youngest kid being two years old when my husband passed on in a car accident. My dad would always say that I grew up with my kids and that while I was raising my kids, they were also raising me," reminisces Shiba.

She further states that: "One time I remember I had done badly in Mathematics with just over 50% and my dad, Mr Sipho Shezi reminded me of how he paid 100% of my school fees, and I managed to score only 50%. He would always ask, 'What are you studying now,' and loved to say, 'Brain cells that are not constantly challenged get retarded.' He liked to tell us that humans have a responsibility to contribute to society's well-being and that can be done better with education,".

"There was no other person I thought could make me excel in my PhD journey than Prof Mokwena, who had a way of making her believe that she was going to make it even though at times it was so overwhelming and felt like it was impossible".

"I believe that if majority of us can study further, become enlightened and armed academically, this can only make the world a better place. Even though it is a difficult journey, it is doable, said Shiba who further said, she would still choose Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University again if she had to choose where to study.

Dr Bwalya Witika's

journey towards becoming a Y2 rated researcher

"I only studied Pharmacy after my mother downloaded 50 pages of information from a Pharmacy professional"

SMU Pharmaceutical Sciences Researcher and Senior Lecturer, Dr Bwalya Angel Witika, has achieved a notable milestone in his academic career, the National Research Foundation (NRF) Y2 Rating. He is among young researchers (40 years or younger), who have held a doctorate or equivalent qualification for less than five years at the time of application. He is recognised by the majority of reviewers as having the potential to establish himself as a researcher (demonstrated by recent research products).

He said being NRF-rated allows him to have a 'slight' voice in his field, with some degree of autonomy and authority. He previously worked in research and academia across three SADC countries and found himself at SMU in 2021. At the time he had a considerable research profile and teaching record. However, the SMU team soon swarmed him with identified strengths and allowed him to work on said strengths to thrive in the environment.

"The Dean of the School of Pharmacy, Prof Patrick Demana, called me into his office a few days into my arrival and told me he had an idea what I could do and being previously rated himself would bet I would soon. Not long after, the Research Director, Prof Mapaseka Seheri identified the possibility

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and had a conversation about the milestone. I was now pumped and figured it was not entirely out of my reach to become an NRF-rated researcher. In summary, it was a lot of work but a lot of belief from a lot of SMU colleagues," he recalls.

The focus of his research is on the development, manufacturing and optimisation of prospective drug delivery systems to deliver active pharmaceutical ingredients (API). The intended purpose of these drug delivery techniques is to deliver API in a controlled manner over a prolonged duration with minimal invasiveness. In addition, his research focus is tailored toward adverse effect reduction. These studies assess the compatibility and possibility of forming therapeutically relevant drug delivery tools.

As an upcoming prolific scholar, Dr Witika has published >45 research articles in the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) accredited journals, three book chapters and is currently working as an Editor of one book. He has contributed to >10 scientific presentations and his work is moderately cited with >830 citations (H-index=16) with collaborative networks in >5 countries. He is enthusiastic about developing the next generation of Pharmaceutical Scientists and is training and mentoring >10 postgraduates and having hosted two postdoctoral. These students have come from no less than five countries across Africa. The research conducted in his laboratory encompasses the core principles of molecular pharmaceutics and biopharmaceutics in drug product development, performance, and therapy.

"I specialise in nano drug design, development, and delivery. I also do a lot of research in biomaterials science and supramolecular chemistry but these all tie back to delivering medicinal compounds to the end user (human or animal) to provide best-case outcomes," he said.

"The impact of my leadership has resulted in many of my students receiving prestigious emerging researcher awards such as the SMU Research Days Best Presentation, Academy of Pharmaceutical Scientists in South Africa (APSSA) Young Scientist Award, The Bongani Mayosi National Health Scholars Programme and various NRF Scholarships," explains Dr Witika.

He is an outstanding young global pharmaceutical scientist working for the past four years (post PhD) at the forefront of the pharmaceutical sciences to produce advanced life-saving medicines that have an impact on global health. In 2021, he was at the forefront of introducing nanomedicine research at SMU. He is currently contributing to basic and translational pharmaceutical research focusing on intellectual property in the design of novel drug delivery systems, nanomedicines, functional biomaterials, and regenerative medicine to produce 21st-century patient-centric medicines for disease prevention/treatment. He said, "Together with Dr Madan Poka, we co-supervised Emmanuel Kiyonga, who is the inventor of SMU's first-ever product patent. The patented product is aimed at improving the treatment of breast cancer and osteoporosis in women's health. The patent discloses multipurpose product technologies that ensure affordability, availability, and adaptability to the needs of communities."

He said his PhD research remains his growing achievement. He is also incredibly proud to have been a part of the university's first patent. That is a testament to the small value he adds to the bigger picture of getting SMU to be a hallmark of health study, research, and innovation. He is quite proud of all his postgraduate students as they are a tireless bunch of young scientists pushing different barriers to achieving excellence. His research group is currently busy with a lot of research aimed at improved treatment and diagnostic outcomes, currently focusing on cancer, TB, diabetes, hair growth and osteoarthritis.

Growing up in Lusaka, Zambia, it was never an option for him to pursue school, but also envied his late dad's work as they were too close. His father was a Professor of Chemical and Mining Engineering, and his mother is also quite academically inclined. In 2008, he enrolled to study Pharmacy at the University of Zambia, under a government bursary and completed his 5-year degree in April 2013. He obtained his Master's at Rhodes University in 2017 and immediately pursued a doctoral degree, which he completed in 2019 and awarded in April 2020.

"My father was very deliberate about the research part and weirdly enough I only studied pharmacy after my mother downloaded 50 pages of information from a pharmacy professional. She works in corporate, so the pharma information was strange but sold me on the possibilities," said Dr Witika, who had the privilege of growing up in an academically inclined household.

He further stated that, "My biggest challenge is to remain relevant in the space. I had spoken to senior people in our field, and they made it abundantly clear that SMU would be a great fit for me to pursue my career. It has taught me to be patient, and more importantly, it drew me towards excellence, efficiency, and integrity. These are in the SMU DNA and will come to me as I work in the space," concludes, Dr Witika, who serves as a member of the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) Technical Advisory Committees for Complimentary Medicines, as well as the Pharmaceutical and Analytical (P&A) Committees.

“I saw that I could do two degrees in one and went for it”

Avuyile Mpiti earns Top Honours from School of Health Care Sciences

Born and raised in a small town in the Eastern Cape, SMU Alumna, Avuyile Mpiti was always an inquisitive child who always wanted to know more than what meets the eye. Growing up, life has not always yielded favourable outcomes. However, her resilience and passion for people allowed her to thrive in spaces that she felt would be too big to occupy. Testament to that, she recently scooped the prestigious School of Health Care Sciences Dean's Merit Award, during the SMU autumn graduation ceremonies.

She said, personally, the award has allowed her to believe in the capabilities she has. “In the duration of my undergraduate studies, I have seen those before me graduate but have never seen the recipient of the award coming from my profession and department. The benefits I have seen from being awarded the Dean's Merit Award are being able to make my family, profession and the SMU Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology (SLP&A) Department proud. I also

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graciously received a voucher from Van Shaik's Bookstore to procure academic resources whenever I further my studies in future," expressed Avuyile.

She further stated that, "I never thought that I would even get to a level in my academics to be afforded this opportunity. I presume that hard work, focus and consistency in achieving high marks every year got me this major award."

SLP&A is a growing profession and the web of influence and impact that it has been unprecedented. With an array of patients in different environments, from hospitals, and schools to industries and mines, the SLP&A profession is a necessity.

"Our scope of practice is developmental and rehabilitation-focused allowing us to make a real impact. Communication is a fundamental aspect of being able to build relationships, to foster independence and ensure that one can be a functional and contributing individual in society. Imagine not being able to speak like you used to, hear your name being called out or learn at the rate your peers are, it must take an emotional toll on you. In this profession, we can play a small part in bridging that gap for a person so they too can have a 'normal' experience of life," said devotedly.

Throughout her clinical years, she said her eyes were opened to endless possibilities to have influence using her profession. Helping a person be able to communicate or to see a person who thought they would never be able to hear smile when they receive a hearing aid, is what made her believe that she indeed made the perfect career choice. She always had the part of her heart that would remind her that her dream was to help people no matter what and this is the part that propels her every day to wake up and choose to be a Speech Therapist and Audiologist over and over and over again.

Discovering that SMU offers the SLP&A programme as a dual degree, was the final puzzle piece for her to finally be at the institution she heard and hoped to study at when growing up.

"Studying a dual degree came with a lot of hard work and to be awarded as the top academic performer was beyond anything I could have imagined walking into SMU in 2020. It has also given a platform to further encourage and inspire upcoming Speech Therapy and Audiology graduates, that it is possible to excel at the highest level if you put your mind to it. I am currently in the latter half of my community service year and am quite new in the professional space but receiving the Dean Merit Award has fostered immense growth and further development in my skills thus far," she said.

She said, "I recall in my first year of studies, one of our lecturers posed this question, '*What propelled you to choose a career in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology?*', to the class at large and my answer back then was simple, "I saw that I could do two degrees in one and went for it". That simple response has since changed as the years went by. I truly feel as though SLP&A chose me. I had no prior knowledge of what the profession entailed and the spaces that I would be able to work in."

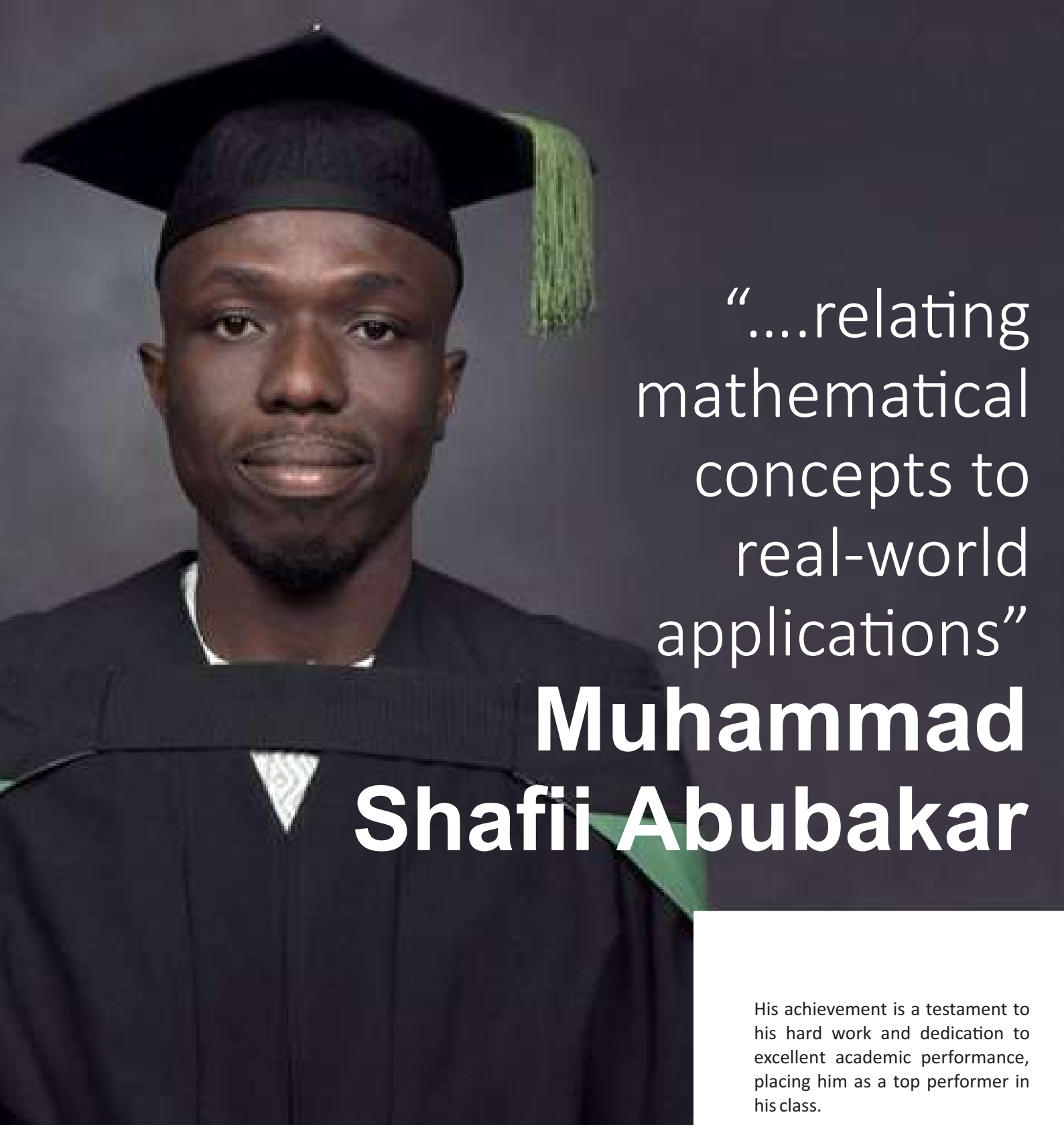
Commencing her SLP&A degree during the COVID-19 pandemic was one of her biggest challenges, including changing to an online mode of teaching and learning was a big adjustment for her.

"WIFI, load-shedding, and Respondus proctoring system kicking me out of my test as I was about to answer the last question, made my first two years of my studies a roller-coaster. Balancing life, family, and friends, being a class representative, clinical and academics often made me feel as though I wish I could split myself into five people. However, over time I found a schedule and way that suited me. I would make lists of things I am required to do and grade them from most to least important. That allowed me to manage the workload and still be able to thrive in all areas of my life," remembers Avuyile, whose family has been the biggest support structure in everything that she put her mind to.

Her proudest academic achievements include, but not limited, to:

- Graduating Bachelor of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology: **Cum Laude (with six distinctions).** Distinctions accumulated in the entirety of the degree: 38.
- **DEAN'S MERIT AWARD**: Top Academic Performer in Health Care Sciences
- **OVERALL TOP STUDENT** in Speech Pathology and Audiology
- **BEST FINAL YEAR STUDENT** in Audiology
- **BEST FINAL YEAR STUDENT** in Speech Pathology:
- **BEST STUDENT CLINICAL AWARD**: SASHLA Prize Audiology
- **BEST STUDENT CLINICAL AWARD:** SASHLA Prize Speech Pathology
- **LEADERSHIP AWARD**

In conclusion, she said, "I am also a praying woman and believe that every ounce of my motivation and strength is God's work. A scripture I live by daily is Jeremiah 29:11: *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*."



“....relating mathematical concepts to real-world applications”

Muhammad Shafii Abubakar

Master of Science (MSc) in Mathematics graduate, Muhammad Shafii Abubakar performed exceptionally well, obtaining Cum Laude honours for his MSc degree. Shafii's remarkable accomplishments highlighted his exceptional mathematical skills and academic dedication. With this achievement, he has demonstrated advanced mathematical knowledge and critical thinking skills, strong analytical abilities, capacity to conduct independent research and contribute to the field of mathematics.

His achievement is a testament to his hard work and dedication to excellent academic performance, placing him as a top performer in his class.

“My Master's achievement truly reflects both my effort and ability. Pursuing a Master's degree in Mathematics requires a significant commitment of time, energy, and intellectual rigour. I am also grateful to my supervisors, Dr Kazeem Aremu, and Prof Maggie Aphane, for nurturing my skills and challenging my ideas until the best was obtained from me,” he said ecstatically.

His MSc thesis titled: *A Study of Neighbourhood Topological Indices and Their Applications to Physical Properties of Antituberculosis Drugs*, is a study that utilizes mathematical

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descriptors derived from the topology of molecular graphs, which represent the structure of a molecule. These indices are used in structure-property models to predict the biological activity or properties of molecules based on their structure. In drug design, these indices assist in optimizing molecular structures by providing insights into how changes in the local topology around certain atoms might affect the molecule's overall properties and interactions with biological targets.

Neighbourhood topological indices can capture the local structural features of antituberculosis drugs, such as the arrangement of atoms, and the connectivity of bonds which has implications in their structure-property predictions.

"We investigated properties such as boiling point, melting point, flash point, enthalpy, molar volumes, molar refractivity, and polarization. Other works of mine have also investigated the energy of chemical graphs and their stability using graph theoretical parameters," he shares.

So far, he has developed a couple of algorithms for the computation of various molecular descriptors ranging from neighbourhood degree-based descriptors to spectral descriptors. All of these works have been published. His algorithms are implemented in a Python programming environment.

"In drug design, our research results can assist in optimizing molecular structures by providing insights into how changes in the local topology around certain atoms might affect the molecule's overall properties and interactions with biological targets. Additionally, my research identified specific structural features that are crucial for a drug's efficacy, and it could also lead to the design of drugs with improved physical properties," said Shafii, who obtained a four-year Bachelor of Science in Mathematics degree from Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Nigeria.

The challenges that come with academic research are enormous, from meeting deadlines to journal article rejection, but with hard work, consistency, and determination, he was able to overcome them. So far, all the two outcomes from his MSc dissertation have been successfully published. He has also been engaged in other collaborative research activities within and beyond the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics, which has led to the acceptance of three more collaborative research articles.

After completing his MSc degree, he realized that there is still so much more to learn and discover in this field. The course offers a comprehensive and rigorous approach to both the theoretical and practical aspects of Mathematics, which is exactly why he needs to deepen his understanding and expertise. He chose to study at SMU because of its formidable reputation in Mathematics and its commitment to research. The Department of Mathematics and Applied staff members at SMU are renowned and rated experts in their fields, and he was particularly impressed by the university's emphasis on fostering innovative and interdisciplinary research, particularly in the intersection of health, technology, sciences, and natural science.

He sees himself becoming a PhD holder in Mathematics, making a positive impact on the lives of others via teaching, mentorship and changing the narrative of mathematics education back home in Bida, a town in Niger State, Nigeria.

"Often, students struggle with Maths because they find it abstract or disconnected from their everyday lives. To address this, I would relate mathematical concepts to real-world applications. Encouraging a growth mindset is crucial too; I would emphasize that math is a skill that can be developed with practice and that mistakes are part of the learning process. By creating a supportive and stimulating learning environment, I would aim to help students build confidence and see the value and enjoyment in learning math," said Shafii who has so far published five research papers.

Shafii's career goals are to contribute significantly to the field of Mathematics, particularly through research and teaching. With his current pursuit of a PhD in Mathematics titled, *A Study of Disease Dynamics via Graph Random Networks*, he aims to deepen his understanding of advanced mathematical theories and applications. He aspires to become a leading academic or researcher, where he can mentor future mathematicians and contribute to solving complex mathematical problems that have real-world implications.

> "My research revolves around the field of graph theory with applications in drug property modelling using machine learning, I am also currently working on mathematical epidemiology via random networks. This involves studying the dynamics of disease transmission using random graph theory models," alluded Shafii, whose long-term goal is to continue working on how to utilize the power of computational mathematics, particularly graph theory to model real-world situations, from health to artificial intelligence.

A first for the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics

Recently, the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics celebrated its milestone of breaking the record for the first time in its history, at SMU, by producing two Y2 and C3 National Research Foundation (NRF) rated researchers, and five Master's graduates. This represents the department's contribution towards institutional research and innovation.

Mathematics Research Associate and NRF Y2-rated, Dr Lateef Jolaoso said that 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. He indicated that the guidance and encouragement from his mentors, namely, the Head of the Maths Department, Prof Aphane and Director of Research and Innovation, Prof Mapaseka Seheri, and his participation in supportive programmes such as the Mathematical Sciences Early Career Fellowship, significantly, enhanced his chances of achieving this esteemed recognition.

> "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 Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematicsin me. This has continued to sharpen my engagement and collaboration with the department," explained Dr Lateef.

Furthermore, Mathematics Master's graduate (Cum-Laude) and PhD student Muhammad Abubakar said that it feels great to be a part of the department's milestone, as this shows the result of the hard work and dedication they have put into research over the years. He indicated that his passion for research and his drive to excel were the driving factors for him. Shafii said he spent countless hours and nights

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pondering and solving complex proofs and models, pushing his analytical skills to the limit.

> “My Master's journey was, undoubtedly, a challenging but rewarding experience. As part of a rigorous programme focused on advanced mathematical training, I worked in the areas of graph theoretical application to health sciences which was a significant intellectual and academic pursuit. Beyond the academic demands, the Master's journey tested my time management and organizational abilities. Through effective planning, self-discipline, and the support of my peers and mentors, I was able to successfully navigate those challenges. At last, I was able to graduate against all odds,” shared the PhD student.

Mathematics Master's graduate (distinction) and Lecturer, Professor Ndlovu stated that with the advanced knowledge and skills that he acquired, he feels a heightened sense of responsibility to apply what he has learned to contribute towards society and his field of expertise. This achievement makes him feel motivated to continue with his studies at a PhD level.

“My Master's journey was not easy because the MSc programme is rigorous, with advanced course work that demands deep understanding and critical thinking. Being able to reach the deadline for submission of my proposal, and articles and compiling a thesis is not easy. Having the best supervisors in Prof Aphane and Dr Lateef made my work easy because they motivated and supported me throughout my studies. My supporting colleagues also contributed by making our place of work feel like home,” expressed the Lecturer.

Ndlovu appreciates all the people who contributed to his success including his family who have been the pillar of his strength during his journey to success. He pointed out that it takes hard work from a student, support from a supervisor, and belief that one can complete a Master's degree.

Prof Aphane applauded , “Although the department is trying its best, it should be noted that there are still some challenges. The department does not have experts in the fields of Complex Analysis, Measure Theory and Integration, and Category theory. Having experts in these fields will add more value to the department,” concluded Prof. Aphane.

Pursuing local relevance

Mathematics and Applied Mathematics fosters collaboration with a School from Ga-Rankuwa

The Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics strives to integrate community-related matters in their teaching, learning, research and innovation. The Department was recently invited by Mapenane Maths, Science and Information and Computer Technology (ICT) School of Specialisation in Zone 16, Ga-Rankuwa, to present the academic programmes and career opportunities in the field of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics to the grades 10 to 12 learners.

After the visit, the Department and the School envisioned a sustainable working relationship to ensure the optimal use of the department's resources to support Mapenane's knowledge production and skills training. Not only was this an initiative to recruit learners for the School, but an effort made to give back to the community.

Maths Lecturer, Mr Professor Ndlovu indicated that he has a strong inclination to assist others and make a positive impact in their lives. Hence, he participated in this outreach. His role involved explaining to learners about various career options they offer and guiding them on effective study methods for the subject. He also provided information about career options available at SMU.

"Most students believe that Mathematics is a difficult subject to understand, and they also tend to delay applying to universities when applications open. My highlights at the School's visit which included explaining and guiding learners about SMU's application process and encouraging them on exam preparations. Those who could not join us missed an opportunity to educate the learners regarding how to tackle Mathematics, prepare for exams, apply to universities on time, and learn about career options available for someone with a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Mathematics," informed Professor.

Master of Science (MSc) in Mathematics student, Ms Sindiswa Mguni said the fact that she was going to meet other learners who share a similar interest in Mathematics motivated her to visit the school as well as to inspire and encourage them.

"I got to watch my colleagues and lecturers inform learners about our programmes and got to help potential students understand our application process at SMU. My experience was something I did not expect because the learners were welcoming and willing to hear more of what was presented," shared Sindiswa.

Mapenane's Deputy Principal, Mr Sinethemba Mbatha stated, "SMU came to visit our school and informed our learners about different careers in Mathematics. The learners were motivated and as we speak, we got a 97% pass rate as the school because of that engagement from SMU's team. In short, their visit had a positive impact on the learners at large".

Remembering

Bohlale Motale Lehloesa

at the SMU's Spring Graduation Ceremony - 2024

"Lephara ale fele moya" -
"May your soul rest in peace."

A deeply emotional moment at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University's (SMU) Spring Graduation Ceremony 2024, was observed when a Master of Science (MSc) degree in Anatomy was conferred posthumously to the late Bohlale Motale Lehloesa. His family, friends, and the academic community gathered to honour his legacy, recognising his extraordinary dedication to his studies and his unwavering commitment to making a difference through medical science.

Bohlale's journey was one of perseverance, intellect, and compassion. Born on April 10, 1999, at Zastron Hospital in the Free State, he grew up in the small Eastern Cape town of Sterkspruit before moving to Sasolburg, where his academic journey began. At Leeuwspruit Primary School, Bohlale thrived, becoming not only a top 10 academic achiever but also an active participant in sports, leadership, and community service. His talents extended into rugby, school patrol, and land service,

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where he demonstrated leadership qualities early on, serving as a class captain and prefect.

When Bohlale enrolled at Sasolburg High School (SHS) in 2013, his academic and athletic talents continued to shine. He played rugby and soccer, while excelling in subjects such as Geography and Life Sciences, building the foundation for what would become a stellar academic career in medical sciences. In 2018, Bohlale took his passion for science to SMU, where he embarked on his university journey, earning a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in 2020 and a BSc Honours in Anatomy in 2021.

His commitment to anatomy and medical research was nothing short of inspiring. Bohlale's academic pursuit continued with his Master's degree, which he began in 2022 under the supervision of Dr Sabashnee Govender-Davies. His thesis, titled *"A Sonographic Description of the Anatomy Related to the Infiltration Between the Popliteal Artery and the Capsule of the Knee (iPACK) Block,"* was submitted on 28 February 2024, shortly before his untimely passing. His research focused on the use of sonographic imaging to describe the anatomy crucial for a specific type of knee block, which has important implications for pain management in knee surgeries.

Bohlale's future as a scientist and researcher was promising, but tragedy struck just as he was on the verge of achieving his academic dreams. On 3 March 2024, he fell gravely ill and was admitted to Mediclinic Gariep Hospital in Kimberley, where he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and bacterial meningitis. Despite receiving treatment, Bohlale passed away on the morning of 12 March 2024, leaving behind a grieving family and a community that had come to admire his determination and passion.

Honouring a Legacy

At the Spring Graduation Ceremony, Bohlale's name was called, and his family tearfully accepted his degree on his behalf. The University expressed its profound sorrow for his loss, but also celebrated his achievements, noting that his work had left a lasting impact on the academic community. Bohlale's research, though he was unable to see it through to publication himself, is expected to continue contributing to medical science, a testament to the mark he left in the world.

Bohlale's parents, Tembisa and Letshepa and his sister Boitumelo stood proudly in his place, accepting the honour with grace, knowing that their son and brother's legacy would live on through his work. They spoke of his deep kindness, his love for the arts, and his determination to, not only, excel academically but also to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

"Bohlale's was a life well-lived, of course not without its challenges, He was God's gift...*ka nnete sekotlolo se setle ha se jelle*. He will forever be in our hearts," said a sobbing Boitumelo on behalf of the family.

A Life Remembered

In his obituary, written in the first person as if speaking from beyond, Bohlale reflected on his short but impactful life. He spoke of the love and support he received from his family, his joy in excelling in school, and his hopes of being remembered for his kindness, his passion for his studies, and his desire to leave a lasting mark in the world. His message was one of peace and gratitude, stating that while his time was short, he had lived a meaningful life filled with purpose.

As SMU celebrated the accomplishments of its graduates, Bohlale's presence was felt deeply. His life, though tragically cut short at just 24 years old, was one of profound dedication and a pursuit of knowledge that inspired everyone who knew him. His research, his passion for anatomy, and his vision for improving medical science will continue to resonate with those who follow in his footsteps.

A Lasting Legacy

Bohlale's journey is a reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of pursuing one's passions with determination and heart. Though he may no longer be with us, his contributions to science and the impact he made on his family, friends, and peers will endure. His work in anatomy, particularly his thesis on the sonographic description of the knee block, will be remembered as an important step in medical science, a final gift from a brilliant young mind whose potential was limitless.

In the words of his family, *"Lephara ale fele moya"— "May your soul rest in peace."*

Meet Dr Esmey Moema

Steering the School of Science and Technology into a hub of innovation and excellence

As a newly appointed Operations Manager (OM) in the School of Science and Technology (SST), Dr Esmey Baratwa Esther Moema is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day activities of the SST, ensuring efficient operations, and supporting the academic mission. This role involves managing resources, implementing processes, and driving results to achieve academic excellence. Her key responsibilities include strategic planning and leadership, resource utilisation and management, project management, community engagement, teaching and learning support, and operational efficiency. Before commencing with her new role, Dr Moema was a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Biology and Environmental Sciences at SMU. Focus on SMU reporter tracked down Dr Moema to share her vision, management style, earmarked projects, and collaborations.

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What is your vision for the School of Science and Technology (SST) as the Operations Manager (OM) and how do you plan to achieve it?

As the OM of SST, my vision is to transform this role into a foundation of excellence and innovation. This position will not be merely a formality but a dynamic force driving SST towards new heights of success and recognition within SMU and beyond. I would like to ensure this role becomes a source of pride for the School's operations. My plan is to implement robust strategic planning processes to streamline operations, enhance efficiency, and support the school's long-term goals and elevate operational excellence. Optimising the use of resources is also crucial to ensure maximum impact and sustainability, leveraging my experience in resource management.

A key function to this role is the nurturing of academic project, research and innovation. I plan to provide comprehensive support to the School and students, encouraging innovative research and academic excellence. Strengthening community engagement initiatives is also a priority, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange with external partners, including corporates and research institutes.

Having started in this position, just recently, I have observed that enhancing leadership and management within SST is essential. I plan to inspire and guide teams, ensuring that projects are executed efficiently and effectively. I will also promote continuous professional development for staff to foster a culture of continuous learning and growth within the school.

Building a strong professional relationships is vital for success. I, therefore, aim to cultivate strong relationships within SST and the broader institution to facilitate seamless communication and collaboration. Expanding and strengthening partnerships with external stakeholders will enhance the School's reputation and opportunities for collaboration.

Finally, promoting innovation and creativity will be at the heart of my approach. I will encourage the development and implementation of innovative solutions to address challenges and seize opportunities, ensuring that SST remains at the forefront of science and technology.

What is your leadership style?

As the OM in the SST and considering that I am only a month into this new role, I embrace a transformational leadership style. This approach is centred on inspiring and motivating the team to reach their highest potential while fostering an environment of continuous improvement and innovation. By promoting open communication, providing regular feedback, and recognising individual contributions, I aim to cultivate a collaborative and dynamic work culture that aligns with the institution's strategic goals. This style, not only, enhances team performance but also supports personal and professional growth of each team member.

Which major projects have you earmarked for the SST?

As the school's OM, I have identified several key projects for the SST to enhance our educational environment and operational efficiency:

- ***Facility Upgrades*:** We plan to renovate and modernise classrooms, laboratories, and communal areas, such as seminar and postgraduate rooms to create a more conducive learning environment. This includes updating technology infrastructure and ensuring that all facilities meet all the required safety standards.
- ***Digital Transformation*:** Introducing new digital tools and platforms to streamline administrative processes, improve communication, and support remote learning. This includes upgrading our student information system and enhancing our online learning management system.
- ***Community Engagement Programmes*:** Developing partnerships with local organisations, industries, and institutions to provide students with real-world learning opportunities and resources. This includes organising career fairs, internships, and community service projects.
- ***Professional Development for Staff*:** Investing in continuous professional development programmes for academic and support staff to develop their skills and keep them updated with the latest technologies and educational trends.

These projects are designed to support the School's mission of providing high-quality education and fostering a safe, inclusive, and innovative learning environment.

How do you foster collaboration and communication among multidisciplinary departments within SST?

As the school's OM, fostering collaboration and communication among multidisciplinary departments within the SST at SMU, this new role, will involve the following strategic actions:

- *Establishment of clear Communication Channels*: Implementation of platforms such as Blackboard, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or internal forums to facilitate regular and transparent communication. This will help to ensure that all departments have access and are trained to use these tools effectively.
- *Collaborative Projects and Research*: Encourage and facilitate joint research projects and interdisciplinary initiatives, as well as fostering of collaboration between different departments.
- *Professional Development Workshops*: Organise workshops and training sessions focused on teamwork, communication skills, and interdisciplinary collaboration. These can help

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reduce working in isolation and build a cohesive team environment.

- *Shared goals and objectives*: Define and communicate shared goals that align with the school's mission, i.e. *to provide quality training in Science and Technology to produce global leaders that inspire solutions to societal problems*. This will help to ensure that all departments understand how their work contributes to these overarching objectives.
- *Open-door policy*: Maintain an open-door policy to encourage informal communication and the sharing of ideas. This can help build trust and foster a more collaborative atmosphere.
- *Use of technology*: Leverage collaboration technologies such as shared digital workspaces, project management tools, and virtual meeting platforms to facilitate seamless communication and collaboration.
- *Feedback mechanisms*: Establish regular feedback mechanisms where departments can provide input on collaboration processes and suggest improvements. This ensures continuous improvement and adaptation.
- *Social events and team-building activities*: Organise social events and team-building activities to strengthen relationships and build a sense of community among staff from different departments.

By implementing these strategies, we can create a collaborative and communicative environment that enhances the overall effectiveness and innovation within the SST.

Can you share your thoughts on the future of Science and Technology, and how you see SST evolving in the next 5-10 years?

The future of science and technology is incredibly promising, with advancements in areas such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, quantum computing, and sustainable energy poised to transform our world. Emerging technologies such as, amongst others, artificial intelligence-powered scientific discovery, and nanotechnology are expected to address global challenges in health, communication, infrastructure, and sustainability.

At SMU, the SST is well-positioned to evolve and thrive over the next 5-10 years. The School is known for its strong focus on interdisciplinary teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and innovation. Here are a few ways it might develop:

- *Enhanced research and innovation*: With a commitment to innovative research, the School will expand its research capabilities, in areas such as mathematics, biotechnology, environmental sciences, information technology, physics, etc. This will include more collaborative projects with industry and international partners.
- *Expanded academic programmes*: The school is already offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, including new fields like Biotechnology and Environmental Toxicology. In the coming years, we can expect further diversification of academic offerings to include emerging fields and specialisations.
- *Integration of technology in education*: The use of advanced technologies such as virtual labs, meta-verse, and online platforms will enhance the learning experience, making education more accessible and effective.
- *Work Integrated Learning (WIL)*: The school is piloting Work Integrated Learning at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, which will become a standard part of the curriculum, providing students with practical, firsthand experience in their fields.

Overall, the SST at SMU is set to become a hub of innovation and excellence, producing graduates who are well-equipped to address the scientific and technological challenges of the future.

Financial Safeguard

by Kabelo Kadiaka

A financial safeguard, a fleeting dream
Protect us from nothing, or so it would seem
A safety net that's tangled, in a web of despair
A cushion soft, that's hiding a snare

A saving plan, that is lost in a haze
Sets aside a portion, of a forgotten phase
An emergency fund, that's drying up fast
When job loss or illness, is just a forecast

Investment-wise, that is foolishly made
A diversified portfolio, that's just a charade
Insurance too, that's just a facade
Against the unexpected, which is always delayed

A financial safeguard, that's just a myth
A myth to know that we are unprepared for life's abyss

SMU Nursing Students Triumph at UJ Sports Day

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University's (SMU) nursing students recently emerged victorious, bringing home a golden trophy after their stellar performance at the Nursing Sports Day hosted by the University of Johannesburg. The event saw participation from SMU, UJ, and Ann Latsky Nursing College, with teams competing in soccer, netball, and board games.

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SMU's nursing soccer team took centre stage by winning the tournament, showcasing, not just their athletic skills, but their pride in representing the university. The netball team also performed exceptionally well, securing second place in the tournament. Vuyo Dlakude, a final-year Class Representative and captain of the nursing soccer team shared the significance of this event for the SMU Nursing Department.

"We re-established the soccer and netball teams earlier this year after being on a halt due to COVID-19. Having nursing sports days was a tradition before the pandemic, and it was my dream to bring it back to life," Dlakude explained.

Vuyo also highlighted that many nursing students felt the need to compete with other institutions beyond interschool tournaments, such as Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) and the University of Pretoria (UP). Their enthusiasm was supported by Nursing Lecturer Dr Eugene Makhavhu, who encouraged their participation at UJ's sports day.

Reflecting on the significance of sports in nursing, Vuyo shared, "Nurses are always part of sports, whether it's providing first aid for injuries, promoting physical and mental health, or managing athlete anxiety and concussions. As future nurses, participating in sports gives us a broader understanding of how we can contribute to athlete health and well-being."

He further emphasized how essential teamwork, communication, and adaptability, skills they practised during the tournament are critical in both sports and nursing.

"We learned to trust one another, much like how nurses must trust each other for patient safety. Sports taught us how to adapt to changing circumstances, just as nurses must be prepared for unexpected shifts in patient conditions," he said.

He also noted the impact that physical activity has on students' mental health and academic performance.

"Exercising improves concentration, focus, and mental clarity. It helps reduce stress and anxiety by releasing endorphins, which boost mood, confidence, and resilience-key factors in student life and mental well-being," Vuyo explained.

"We want SMU to be known across all nursing departments in the country for our achievements on and off the field," he concluded.

Looking forward, Vuyo hopes that such sports events will continue, allowing students to network and engage beyond their academic environment. He also expressed his vision for SMU's Nursing Department to be recognized nationally, not only for producing academically successful graduates but also for developing well-rounded individuals who excel in both academics and sports.

SMU mourns the passing of a visionary leader and Chancellor Tito Mboweni

The Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) is deeply saddened by the loss of our esteemed Chancellor, Tito Titus Mboweni. His visionary leadership, which began on 10 May 2024, has left an indelible mark on our institution and the nation. His passing creates a void that will be deeply felt, but his legacy will continue to guide and inspire us all.

Mboweni was a respected political figure and a man of great warmth, wit, and dedication. One of his early engagements as Chancellor was a "meet and greet" with SMU's management, labour, and student representatives on 7 August 2024, an event that many now regard as a historic moment for the university. During this gathering, in his characteristic humorous style, he lightened the mood by joking, “You'll be glad that I did not prepare lunch today,” a testament to his approachable nature and love for connecting with people.

Throughout his tenure as Chancellor, Mboweni showed a deep commitment to SMU's growth and sustainability. He engaged with university leadership on critical issues, such as infrastructure development, academic innovation, and financial sustainability. On 4 September 2024, Mboweni had a dinner engagement with the university council in which he urged SMU to focus on the delivery of the academic project and forge partnerships in areas of knowledge production and research with like-minded institutions in Africa and the world. He also emphasised the importance of securing external funding and investing in infrastructure to improve the student experience and the university's competitive standing in the health sciences sector. He saw SMU as an institution of higher learning and a beacon of health and wellness that could lead South Africa and the African continent towards improved healthcare outcomes.

With a background that includes serving as South Africa's Minister of Finance and Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Mboweni brought unparalleled expertise and vision to SMU. His signature remains immortalised on banknotes still in circulation—a symbol of his far-reaching influence. As Chancellor, he actively supported the university's vision of establishing a fit-for-purpose teaching hospital to enhance SMU's clinical training and research capabilities. He understood that expanding the training platforms for healthcare professionals was not just a priority, but an urgent necessity for both SMU and the country.

His vast network, built through years of leadership in both public and private sectors, opened doors for SMU, helping the university forge international partnerships and attract resources. He emphasised the importance of private-public collaboration, urging the university to leverage private capital for research, infrastructure, and other key projects. His strategic thinking was driven by the belief that SMU could elevate itself through focused initiatives that would ensure its sustainability and global competitiveness.

Educationally, Mboweni held a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Political Science from the National University of Lesotho and a Master's degree in Development Economics from the University of East Anglia. He held numerous prominent roles, including Advisor to Goldman Sachs International, Chairman of Nampak Limited, and Non-Executive Director at Discovery Limited. These positions and his remarkable public service made him one of South Africa's most respected leaders.

In his time at SMU, Mboweni became more than just a figurehead. He was a guiding force who saw the potential for SMU to be a global leader in health sciences. His pragmatic approach to the complexities of higher education and his ability to balance the pursuit of resources with social change was remarkable. As he once wisely noted, "Contradictions are an inherent mechanism in the advancement of social change.”

SMU extends its deepest condolences to Mboweni's family, friends, and all who knew him. His passing is a significant loss not only to SMU but also to the entire nation. His unwavering commitment to serving the people of South Africa will continue to inspire generations to come. As we mourn his loss, we also celebrate his life and the extraordinary legacy he leaves behind.

May his soul rest in peace.

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Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
13 October 2024

10 YEARS
2014 - 2024
ANNIVERSARY

SEFAKO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

Celebrating

our history-projecting into the future.