



VAAL UNIVERSITY
OF TECHNOLOGY

AUTUMN GRADUATIONS 2024

Special Publication



CLICK image to
navigate to the
article



Note from the Editor

WELCOME TO OUR AUTUMN GRADUATIONS SPECIAL PUBLICATION.

The VUT Community recently gathered at the Desmond Tutu Great Hall for the Autumn Graduations to celebrate the incredible achievements of the Graduating Class of 2024. From a total of sixteen graduation sessions, the University conferred a whopping 3 965 qualifications across our expansive catalogue of industry tailored undergraduate and postgraduate programmes which span the fields of Applied and Computer Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Human Sciences and Management Sciences.

From a VUT storytelling point of view, graduations are not just about the ululations and tears of joy – the pomp and ceremony – the admiration of tuxedos and glitzy mermaid trumpet dresses – the monk straps with happy socks and red bottom stilettos with fishnet stockings. NO!

Graduations are a fertile ground to churn out some of the amazing stories of our graduates – from their inspirational journeys to those Masters and PhD dissertations that are topical and steer public discourse, while offering solution for real-life societal challenges. They are also a moment to reflect on the journeys that have brought the graduates to that moment. From their study years, each graduate has a unique story to tell; of overcoming challenges, embracing opportunities, and growing in ways that have shaped not only their academic paths but also their character and resilience.

In this special publication, we highlight some of these stories of triumph, tales of defying all odds and convention, as well as those of inspiring generations. These are not just stories for their own sake – each carry with it an important institutional key message. In addition to the story of “Access to Success” and the uninterrupted core business of the university: teaching and learning, other stories include:

- “Visually impaired VUT graduate ready to conquer the tourism management industry” which highlights the available support mechanisms for disabled students, while also promoting inclusivity and transformation.

- “From a cleaner to a graduate: A tale of defying convention and inspiring generations” a story of VUT being an enabling environment that allows for staff members across all levels to elevate themselves through education.

- “VUT masters graduate’s thesis, a game changer in water quality management” we conduct relevant research that matters and solves real lives problems.

- “VUT SRC President and Treasurer General step into the future as graduates” support systems for student leaders. VUT’s undertaking to produce holistically developed graduates who can make a difference in their immediate communities.

- Effective systems to help international students transition from their countries of origin into the new culture and educational environment of SA to excel academically.

VUT proactively forges collaborations with industries to ensure relevance and applicability of education and research. These relationships with partners from industry, commerce, professional bodies and communities across South Africa also enrich our academic and research endeavors and enhance the value of our qualifications. To make these ceremonies truly memorable and enriching, they were graced by an array of notable personalities from these partners including from government, civic and development organisations.

Happy reading, and don’t forget to puff and pass!

Yours,

Dumile Mlambo
Head of Department: Corporate Communication



VAAL UNIVERSITY
OF TECHNOLOGY

20

celebrating 20 years as a UoT

VAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

The journey:

The year 2024 marks exactly 20 years of the existence of the Vaal University of Technology. The university was first established as a college for advanced technical education in 1966 and then transitioned into a Technikon in 1979. With the restructuring of the higher education landscape, the institution became a University of Technology in 2004, and has seen significant growth in its activities and reach since that time. The university currently boasts close to 20 000 active students.

This is testament to the institution's dedication to education, innovation, and excellence in the field of technology. Such anniversaries are not only moments to reflect on past achievements but also to look forward to future advancements and contributions to the world of technology and academia.

Academic Achievements and Graduate Success:

Throughout the years, VUT has and continues to offer an expansive catalogue of industry tailored undergraduate and postgraduate programmes which span the fields of Applied and Computer Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Human Sciences and Management Sciences. Our diverse Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) caters to a wide range of students with interests and ambitions in various disciplines.

Our innovative learning method facilitated by committed and esteemed thought leaders is the reason our institution has remained a reputable contributor to the country's knowledge edifice over the two decades. We proudly celebrate the vibrant tapestry of success woven by our esteemed alumni by shining a spotlight on the invaluable contributions of these accomplished individuals who once walked our halls and now stride confidently in diverse fields locally and internationally. From groundbreaking innovations to transformative leadership roles, our alumni exemplify the embodiment of our institution's commitment to nurturing talent and fostering lifelong connections.

An incubator of techno-entrepreneurial graduates and innovators

Located in a historical industrial hub, we have a vision to foster "Learning and Innovation for a Digitally Smart and Sustainable Industrial Progress and Socio-Economic Transformation." Our mission is to produce techno-entrepreneurial graduates and innovators who will serve as catalysts for a vibrant transformation of a flourishing and sustainable society, industry, and commerce. To achieve this, we provide technology-enhanced teaching and learning, quality living and learning communities, high-impact research and innovation that contributes to solving society and industry challenges.

Innovative Research:

With several centres of excellence and NRF-rated professors, we pride ourselves with being associated with world-class academics and researchers who not only produce ground-breaking research that solves real life problems, but also empower aspiring researchers to engage the most experienced minds in several research fields as their aides.

We are the only university in South Africa that fully owns a Science and Technology Park which is home to the Technology Transfer and Innovation which is a strategic technology hub that endeavors to promote SMMEs and industrial competitiveness. Its strategic location (Sebokeng), available infrastructure as well as the current entrepreneurial culture make it an ideal implementing agency for driving regional government programmes within the Southern Gauteng region.

The VUT Law Clinic which is also housed at the same precinct, offers free legal services to the indigent members of the Emfuleni community on matters related to Domestic Violence, Maintenance, Divorces, Drafting of Wills, Children's Court, Social justice issues such as the right to housing and unlawful evictions as well as labour related issues especially unfair dismissal.

Industry Partnerships:

The university proactively forges collaborations with industries to ensure relevance and applicability of education and research. These relationships with partners from industry, commerce, professional bodies and communities across South Africa also enrich our academic and research endeavors and enhance the value of our qualifications.

Community Engagement

The need to foster meaningful relationships between academic institutions and their surrounding communities, has been a focal point of discussion over the years. Through our department of Community Engagement, VUT continues to play a crucial role in promoting social responsibility, civic engagement, and sustainable development in the broader surrounding communities to create a positive impact and reciprocal and mutual learning for the benefit of social humanity. In addition to giving back to the community, such initiatives are aligned to, and underpinned by one of the University's strategic pillars of Socially Engaged Scholarship.

VAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
Inspiring thought. Shaping Talent.



Autumn Graduations: Celebrating Academic Excellence and Achievement

By: Staff Reporter

From 15 – 20 April 2024 the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) celebrated the academic accomplishments of its 3 705 graduates at its Autumn Graduations held at the Desmond Tutu Great Hall.

Of the total number of qualifications that which were conferred, 48 were doctorates and master's degrees, 459 BTech and Postgraduate Diplomas, while 3 198 represents advanced diplomas, diplomas and national diplomas – all from across our four Faculties: Applied & Computer Sciences, Engineering & Technology, Human Sciences and Management Sciences.

In his congratulatory message, VUT Vice Chancellor and Principal, Prof Stephen Khehla Ndlovu said he was privileged to witness the culmination of graduates' hard work, dedication, and perseverance. "You have shown not only academic excellence but also the qualities of resilience, determination, and adaptability that are essential for success in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world," he said. "As you step into the next phase of your life – be it furthering your studies, entering the workforce, or pursuing your passions, remember that the skills and experiences you have gained here will guide you towards achieving your

dreams and making a positive impact to the world" continued Prof Ndlovu.

He further urged graduates to remain curious, continue to learn, and to never shy away from challenges, saying it is through challenges that they would grow and evolve. "Be courageous in pursuing your goals, compassionate in your interactions, and ethical in your decisions."

He concluded by reminding attendees that this year's graduations coincide with the university's celebration of twenty years as a University of Technology. "Throughout these years, VUT has and continues to offer an expansive catalogue of industry tailored undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Our diverse Programme Qualification Mix caters to a wide range of students with interests and ambitions in various disciplines."

Each session featured distinguished guests, keynote speakers, and performances by the university choir to add grandeur to the event that marked the beginning of graduates' professional careers and contributions to society.

PhD study could be a major boost for small and medium enterprises in SA

By: Puleng Maphisa

Dr Zamurai Magora Masuka wears many hats; from being a director of an independent school in Benoni to a seasoned marketer with a rich academic background. Armed with a BCom in Marketing and an Honors BCom from Unisa, as well as an MBA from Mancosa, Masuka's journey has been driven by a profound curiosity about the dynamics of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and a determination to unravel the mysteries behind their growth limitations.

He recently graduated from the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) for Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Business Administration, with a thesis titled: A model for Entrepreneurship Orientation, Management, Operational Efficiency and Performance in South Africa Small and Medium Enterprises.

His doctoral research delved deep into the SME sector, focusing on the interplay between entrepreneurship orientation, management practices, operational efficiency, and overall performance within South Africa. Dr Masuka's findings were revelatory, revealing that key dimensions like proactiveness, risk-taking, innovativeness, and autonomy significantly influence SME operational efficiency. Moreover, factors such as management culture, formal structures, reward philosophies, and growth orientation play pivotal roles in enhancing SME performance.

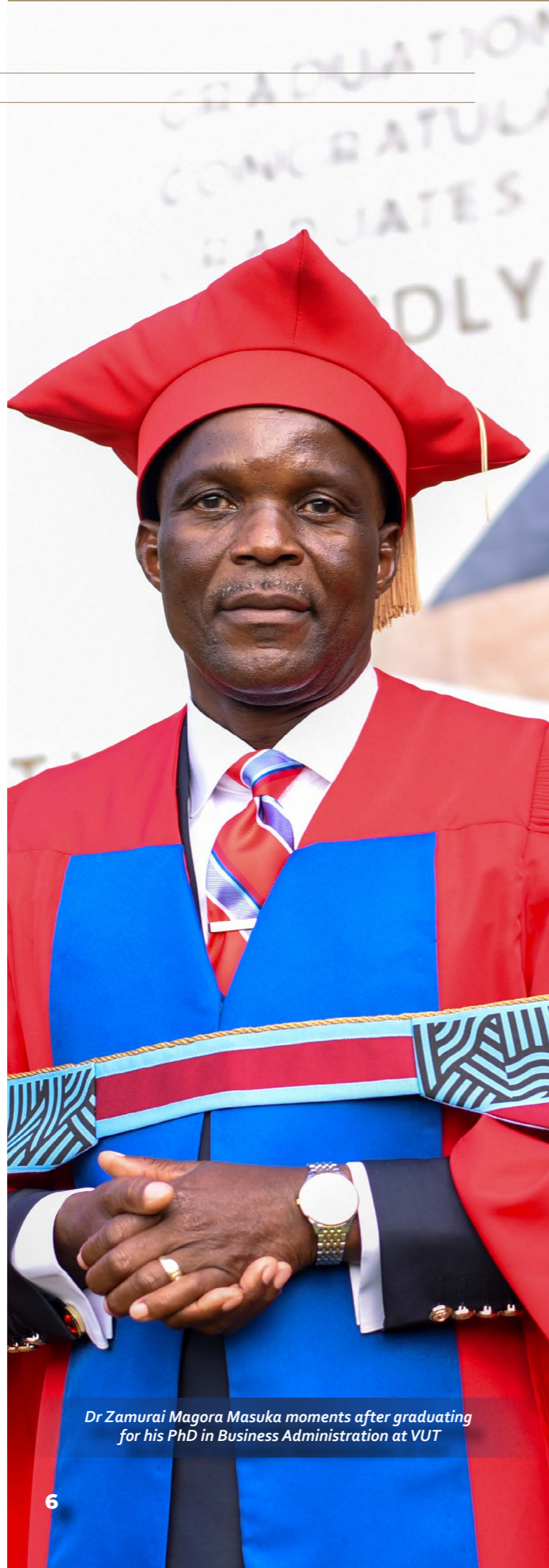
Driven by a passion to uplift the SME sector, Dr Masuka's ultimate goal extends beyond academic achievements. He aspires to become a full professor, leveraging his expertise to empower small business owners and managers, thereby catalyzing economic growth and employment opportunities in South Africa.

Throughout his academic journey, Dr Masuka's thirst for knowledge has been limitless, delight in the diverse perspectives and challenges encountered along the way. Despite difficulties like data gathering setbacks and balancing multiple roles as a family man, educator, and pastor, Dr Masuka's commitment to the cause was never shaken. His advice to aspiring doctoral candidates confirms his own journey, emphasizing the vital role of motivation and unwavering commitment. Dr Masuka said that VUT played a crucial role in nurturing his academic pursuits, providing a supportive environment and invaluable knowledge.

Rooted in personal experiences, he draws inspiration from his late mother, a good example of life and strength despite facing hard times. Balancing his various roles required careful planning and unwavering support from his family, particularly his wife Sharon.

Looking ahead, he imagines a future where he continues to impart knowledge, both as an educator and through hands-on training for SME owners and managers. Rejecting the label of a mere motivational speaker, Dr Masuka sees himself as a source of commitment, emphasizing its role as the driving force behind realizing one's aspirations.

In addition to his academic activities, Dr Masuka's involvement in the education sector as a managing director and his role as a pastor further enrich his multifaceted personality. Whether manoeuvring for his school, teaching, or delivering motivational speeches, Dr Masuka's overarching mission remains clear, to ignite commitment and drive positive change in the lives of individuals and the SME sector as a whole.



Dr Zamurai Magora Masuka moments after graduating for his PhD in Business Administration at VUT



VUT masters graduate's thesis, a game changer in water quality management



Olayinka Emmanuel Adisa pictured with his Masters Supervisor, Dr Agnes Pholosi whom he has expressed profound gratitude for her guidance.

By: Qhawekazi Memani

South Africa is a water scarce country and therefore, requires a comprehensive water quality management system, which is crucial for amongst others, the environmental sustainability and public health.

To grow the body of knowledge in this complex discipline, extensive research is required – a call that Olayinka Emmanuel Adisa, a recent VUT Master of Applied Science in Chemistry graduate (Cum Laude), fearlessly responded to.

With a thesis titled: "Synthesis of magnetite polydopamine-methyl-β-cyclodextrin adsorbent for the adsorption of antibiotics from wastewater", Adisa's research is set to be a game changer and a great boost to the country's water quality management efforts. By developing a cost-efficient and highly effective adsorbent for removing antibiotic pollutants from wastewater, Olayinka's work promises to make a tangible impact on water quality management efforts.

A determined scholar hailing from the vibrant state of Osun in Nigeria's Southwestern region, Adisa says he has always had a fervent passion for research and a commitment to academic excellence. During his tenure at VUT, Olayinka served as both a resolute tutor, immersing himself in the pursuit of knowledge and the exploration of innovative solutions to real-world challenges. All this came to fruition when he graduated on 15 April 2024,

marking a significant milestone in his academic career.

Reflecting on his achievement, he expressed profound gratitude for the guidance of his supervisor, Dr Agnes Pholosi, senior lecturer in the department of Natural Sciences at VUT, the university support, and the invaluable experience gained through tutoring at the Mathematics, Science, Engineering, and Technology (MSET) centre. He attributes his success to God's grace and sees this accomplishment as a steppingstone to even greater endeavours.

Looking ahead, with his sights set on pursuing a PhD and continuing his personal and professional development, Adisa remains steadfast in his commitment to lifelong learning and growth. He emphasizes the importance of balance and effective time management in achieving one's goals.

To aspiring students and colleagues seeking to further their studies, he offers sage advice: "prioritize God, seek out innovative knowledge, and make the most of every opportunity that comes your way."

His motto, "River never goes reverse," serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of resilience and forward momentum in the face of challenges.



NEHAWU Chairperson at VUT bags postgraduate qualification in higher education



LEADING BY EXAMPLE: Mr Miehleketo Life Rihlampfu standing next to the Desmond Tutu Great Hall, just moments after receiving his Post Graduate Diploma of Higher Education.

By: **Thabisang Thebeeapelo**

Among the thousands of graduates who were conferred their different qualifications at this year's VUT's Autumn Graduations, was Mr Miehleketo Life Rihlampfu, Branch Chairperson of the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu), one of the officially recognized labour unions at the university.

Rihlampfu graduated for his Post Graduate Diploma of Higher Education from VUT's Faculty of Human Science.

From the heart of Limpopo, Giyani, the transformative leader's educational achievements highlight the value of lifelong learning and professional development, particularly in the fields of education and labor rights activism. Rihlampfu described the experience as challenging, especially with all the issues he had to tackle for his constituency, which salary negotiations, contract conversions to name a few. Mr Rihlampfu's road to academic success demonstrates his constant commitment to breaking down barriers and overcoming challenges.

Born into a humble background, he draws inspiration from his late father, who worked tirelessly as a domestic worker to provide for their family. This heritage of hard work and determination drives Mr Rihlampfu's relentless pursuit of educational advancement and social justice.

"I have noticed that many students arrive at the university solely focused on academic pursuits, yet it is imperative to recognize that a university offers more than just scholastic endeavors. It is critical to cultivate universal talents because the academic atmosphere provides a platform for overall development. As a result, I urge students to develop a varied skill set and strive for personal growth in addition to earning a degree," said the chairman.

He wishes to extend his heartfelt gratitude to the support staff, service workers, and cleaners, a representation of whom he proudly displayed through the attire he wore during his graduation ceremony.



Visually impaired graduate ready to conquer the Tourism Management industry

By: **Thabisang Thebeeapelo**

"I decided to pursue tourism after being introduced to it during my grade 9 school camps. These camps, coordinated by Eco-Access, provided me with a unique glimpse into the tourism industry. Their approach to ecotourism piqued my interest and created a passion for the field. Consequently, I chose to embark on a career path in Tourism Management", said the newly qualified tourism management professional, Nomsa Radebe, who obtained her Advanced Diploma in Tourism Management from VUT.

Nomsa, a 36-year-old visually impaired woman originates from Sebokeng, one of the townships in the Vaal region. She hails from a family of three children, consisting of two females and one male, with her being the second eldest. Nomsa received her primary education at Sibonile School for the Blind, followed by her secondary education at Filadelfia Secondary School. While she primarily speaks Zulu, Nomsa is also proficient in other languages such as Sesotho, Sepedi, and English.

"Having confidence in myself and thinking that I can succeed just like everyone else enabled me to work closely with my lecturers during my studies."

In navigating her academic journey, Nomsa emphasizes the vital role of effective communication and support services. "Communicating with my lecturers and with the assistance of the disability unit, transcribing my study material in a way that I can study like other students and perform all my academic work, were instrumental in my journey" she states. This collaborative endeavor emphasizes the need for accessible education for visually impaired people, ensuring equitable possibilities for academic achievement.

"People like Bongani Mahange from the Disability Services Office helped me a lot by revising my work into a user-friendly manner so that I could work efficiently if I faced any academic hurdles. Having positive relationships with my classmates also helped me a lot. It was not easy, but having friends who were always there for me when I needed them kept me always motivated."

Nomsa's passion for athletics has served as a monument to her tenacity and determination throughout her incredible journey. "Blindness may obscure the eyes but never the soul," said Ben Tolosa, expressing Nomsa's indomitable spirit. Despite the limitations of visual impairment, Nomsa has excelled in sports, breaking the South African 200-meter record in 2007. Furthermore, she has embraced the world of goalball, demonstrating her talent and determination in a sport designed for visually challenged people. Nomsa's accomplishments not only challenge prejudices but also demonstrate the limitless potential that exists within.

"As any other person without a disability, I always plan out my day, and I believe that my impairment does not prevent me from doing other things. I think that being independent also helped me to truly manage my academic and personal life at the same time, and I can accomplish other things, such as taking care of myself even if I am visually impaired.

She wishes that one day she can be hired by one of the travel agencies to gain experience and bring about positive change within that company. In the future, she envisions herself either owning a travel agency or working as a tour guide as well.

The most rewarding projects for Nomsa were assignments because they pushed her to learn beyond what was presented in lectures. They encouraged her to seek additional information, enhancing her

understanding and knowledge. Modules such as research particularly motivated her, inspiring her to pursue further studies towards a Post-graduate Diploma in Tourism Management. "Despite facing challenges, such as the heavy workload and technical issues like her laptop malfunctioning, Nomsa persevered. With determination and strategic thinking, she overcame obstacles to complete her work within the given time frame, with valuable guidance from her supervisor," Prof. Limpho Lekauta.

"To my fellow visually impaired students who are studying. If you encounter challenges along your academic journey, don't let them discourage you. Believe in yourself, stay determined, and put in the hard work. You can overcome obstacles and succeed, just as I have. Remember to collaborate with your lecturers and classmates; their support is invaluable. If I could achieve my goals despite facing difficulties, I'm confident that you can too.", stated Nomsa.



MOMENT OF PRIDE: Nomsa Radebe proudly posing for a photo with her Advanced Diploma in Tourism Management in hand.



FALLEN BUT NOT FORGOTTEN



Motshabi Allita Paile's family shortly before receiving her Post-Graduate Diploma in Food and Beverage Management, posthumously.

Late Motshabi when she was graduating for her B-Tech in Food and Beverage Management (Cum Laude) in 2019

By: Puleng Maphisa

In the realm of academia, the journey towards graduation is often portrayed as a culmination of years of hard work, dedication, and perseverance. However, for some, like Motshabi Allita Paile, this journey was cut short, leaving behind unfinished dreams and aspirations. Yet, amongst the sorrow, there exists an emotional touch about her name that resonates with dedication and resilience.

Motshabi was more than a mere student; she embodied the spirit of determination and excellence during her time at VUT. Graduating with a B-Tech in Food and Beverage Management with Cum Laude honors in 2019, she stood as a testament to what relentless pursuit of knowledge and unwavering dedication could achieve. Her academic expertise was further acknowledged with a Vice-Chancellor's Award, a recognition of her outstanding achievements within the university community.

But Motshabi's journey didn't end there; it was merely a stepping-stone towards greater heights. She seamlessly transitioned into the professional realm, becoming a prominent figure within her field and serving as a food and beverage specialist at South African Airways, subject moderator and advisory board member for the food service management programme at VUT to name a few. Her expertise and passion for her work brightened every work she undertook, earning her respect and admiration from colleagues and peers alike.

In 2023, Motshabi cherished aspirations of pursuing her Masters, a testament to her everlasting thirst for knowledge and self-improvement. However, fate had other plans, as she was offered the opportunity to pursue a Post-Graduate Diploma in Food and Beverage Management, due to the alignment of old qualifications with the NQF levels of the new qualification. Despite setbacks from her original path, Motshabi embraced the challenge with characteristic grace and determination.

Tragedy struck on the 19th of November 2023, shattering the lives of those who knew and loved Motshabi. Her family was left reeling from the sudden loss, struggling with the unfathomable pain of her absence. Yet, among their grief, they found comfort in the permanent

mark she left in the world.

Within the walls of VUT, Motshabi's absence was strongly felt, leaving a void that could never truly be filled. Dr Kuda Marumo-Ngwenya, one of her lecturers, fondly recalled Motshabi as one of the most dedicated students she had the privilege of teaching. "The hospitality staff members and the HoD express their gratitude to the Paile and Mdluli families. It was an honour to have a student of such great calibre", she said, adding that Motshabi's commitment to her studies never wavered.

Dr Marumo-Ngwenya recounted Motshabi's dedication which transcended even to the confines of illness. "Motshabi would send an email to her lecturers informing them that she is hospitalized, despite that she would submit assignments on time," she shared, her voice touched with appreciation and sorrow.

Motshabi's legacy continued to resonate even in her absence, as she was posthumously honored during the Autumn graduations. On the 19th of April 2024, exactly five months after her passing, her husband, Mr Thapelo Paile, ascended the stage to collect her late wife's certificate, an emotional moment that underscored the enduring impact of her legacy.

Her husband, visibly moved by the occasion, struggled to find words to express the deep loss he felt. "Motshabi's absence left a void that can never truly be filled," he said, his voice thick with emotion. "But her spirit lives on in all of us, a beacon of hope and inspiration that will continue to guide us forward. I am truly thankful that God blessed me with her, she was a phenomenal woman."

Amongst the guest/ audience was Motshabi's parents and her three children Palesa, Khumo and Rorisang. As we bid farewell to our fallen VUT alumna, may her spirit find eternal peace, and may her legacy of dedication and hard work serve as a guiding light for generations to come.

FROM CLEANER TO A GRADUATE: A tale of defying convention and inspiring generations

By: Puleng Maphisa

When this year's success stories of the VUT Autumn Graduations are written, that of Ms Lebohang Esther Sebolai, will also go down in the history books. From humble beginnings as a cleaner, to a National Diploma in Human Resource Management (M+3) graduate, hers is not only a remarkable tale of defying convention, but one that would inspire generations to come.

When Esther started working at VUT as a cleaner in 2011, little, if at all, did she ever imagine that one day she would sit amongst the graduates, let alone in the very same hall she used to scrub its floors, preparing it for the graduations for over 10 years.

Reflecting on her journey, she says she was encouraged to study by Prof Irene Moutlana, the then VUT Vice-Chancellor and Principal who urged service workers (cleaners and groundsmen) to elevate themselves through education. This led to her enrolling for her National Diploma in Human Resource Management in 2015 which she only completed in 2023 – exactly nine years later of determination and perseverance.

On multitasking, she openly shared the difficulty of juggling between her roles as a mother, student, and worker with demanding job responsibilities, while being the primary breadwinner at home. In her own admission, she says the initial years were challenging, marked by missing lectures and failed modules – yet she remained firm in her pursuit of success. She also concedes that being the elder within youthful peers, posed its own set of challenges, however she pushed herself.

Remembering her moments of self-doubt, Esther acknowledged the crucial role of her colleague, Ms. Nokhuthula Samba who embarked on the journey with her, later achieving an Advanced Diploma. She says, Nokhuthula's success served as an inspiration to her to persevere persistently towards her aspirations. When asked about motivating her colleagues, she says she encouraged them to pursue their dreams uncompromisingly, mentioning her own transformation from a cleaner to a graduate as evidence of what dedication and hard work can achieve.

In a heartening expression of recognition, the VUT Alumni Relations Office presented Esther with a fashionable VUT-branded gold shirt, symbolizing their admiration and respect. VUT proudly salutes and honors all employees across all levels who pursue lifelong learning.



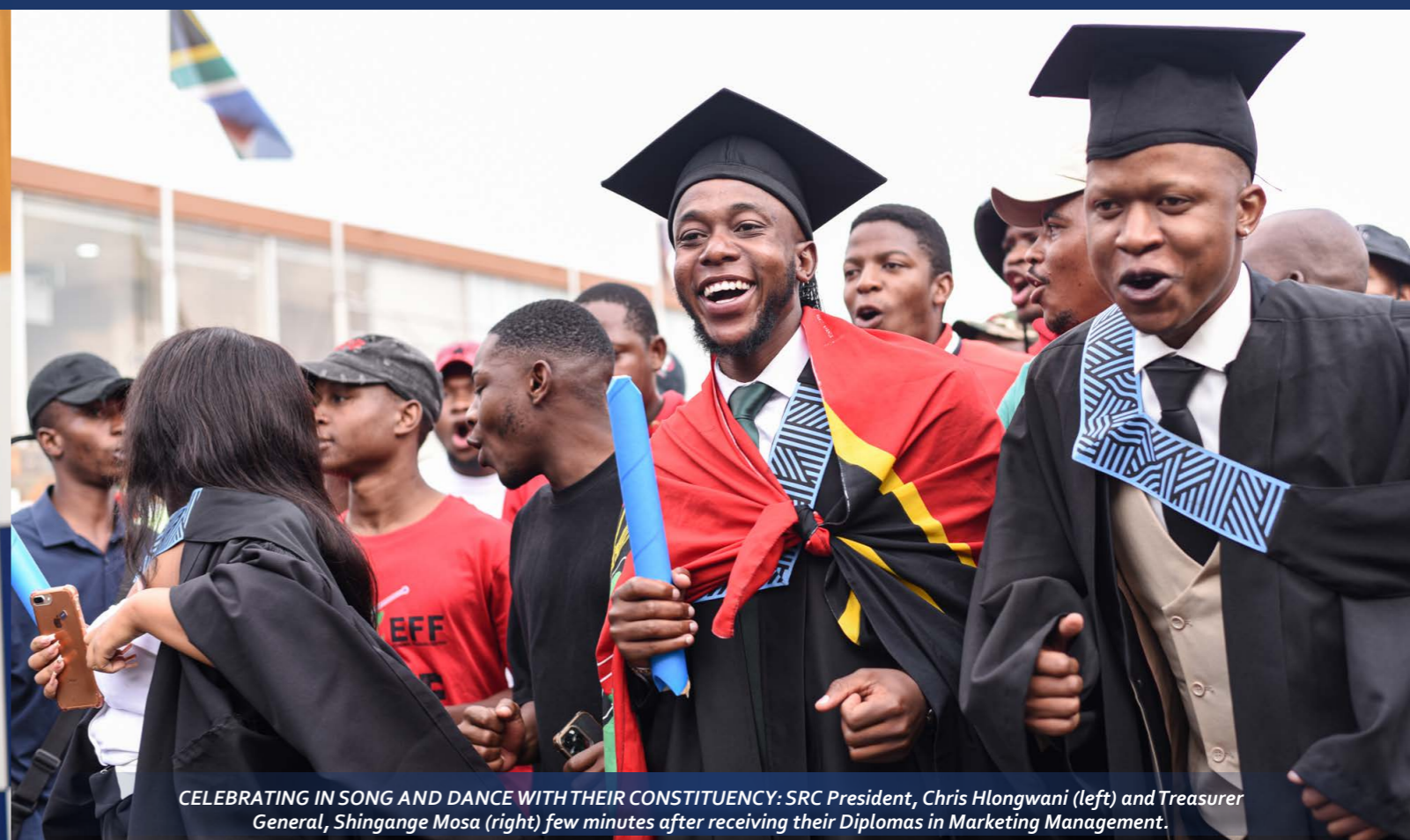
PROUD MOMENT: Ms Lebohang Esther Sebolai raising her National Diploma in Human Resource Management.

Chemical Engineering graduate, an industry trailblazer under steady construction

SRC President and Treasurer General step into the future as graduates



ALL SMILES: Simphiwe Zwane patiently waiting for the Executive Dean: Faculty of Engineering and Technology, Prof Khaled Abou-El-Hossein (Khaled) as he reads out her name.



CELEBRATING IN SONG AND DANCE WITH THEIR CONSTITUENCY: SRC President, Chris Hlongwani (left) and Treasurer General, Shingange Mosa (right) few minutes after receiving their Diplomas in Marketing Management.

By: Tshepiso Kaibe

At just 21 years of age, Simphiwe Zwane has started paving her way in the field of Chemical Engineering. Hailing from Orange Farm in the Vaal Triangle, her journey to academic excellence and leadership is nothing short of inspirational.

Zwane's path to success was not initially mapped out in Chemical Engineering. Her goals initially leaned towards a degree in Pharmacy, but fate had other plans when she found herself in the world of Chemical Engineering, a field she later grew to enjoy.

Despite the turn of events, Zwane's hunger for success remains testament of dedication and hard work. She embraced the challenge head-on, graduating Cum Laude with an Advanced Diploma in Chemical Engineering at the 2024 Autumn Graduations. Her achievements extend beyond the academic scope and into leadership as well.

As the former President of the Society of Chemical Engineers student structure for two years, she demonstrated exceptional leadership skills guiding her peers with dedication. Her leadership, however, was not confined to student organizations alone. Recognizing the need for greater female representation in engineering, Zwane founded the NGO 'Women in Engineering' during her time at VUT, championing gender equality and empowering young women to pursue careers in STEM.

Under her leadership, she spearheaded several successful initiatives which include organizing educational trips to plant firms for Chemical

Engineering Students. Her NGO, Women in Engineering also scooped an award for Best Academic Structure at the inaugural Student Life Achievement Awards last year, organised by Student Support Services (SSS) Department to appreciate the hard work of students outside of the lecture halls.

She mentioned that juggling the demands of both academics and leadership came with ease for her. "I am a person that enjoys being busy, so when I was not busy with academics, I would find something else to do," said Zwane. Talk about wearing different hats at different places, outside her Presidency, she also served as a peer educator and mentor, guiding and inspiring others on their academic journeys.

Currently pursuing her Honors at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), Zwane shows no signs of slowing down. She expresses hopes to continue furthering her studies and one day work in Research.

Behind Zwane's success lies a strong support system, including her mother, whom she describes as her biggest cheerleader, and her lecturers. She also emphasizes the importance of building meaningful relationships with the school community for more access to opportunities.

We wish to congratulate Zwane and wish her luck as she continues to trailblaze the field of Chemical Engineering.

By: Thabisang Thebeeapelo and Tshepiso Kaibe

As VUT walls buzzed with excitement during the 2024 Autumn Graduations, there was a special duo that stood out among the crowd; the Student Representative Council (SRC) President, Chris Hlongwani and Treasurer General, Shingange Mosa. Their shared Limpopo origin adds to their exceptional accomplishment.

The two have not only left a mark on the student body but are now set to embark on a new journey as graduates, armed with Diplomas in Marketing Management.

Hlongwani has demonstrated remarkable leadership qualities during his tenure as the 2023/2024 SRC President at VUT. His road to this position was defined by a strong dedication to student welfare and a desire to effect positive change on campus. Complementing his efforts, Mosa contributed his experience and dedication to the post of Treasurer General, advocating for financial accountability and openness inside the SRC and institution at large.

As representatives of the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC), Hlongwani and Shingange brought a distinct perspective to their leadership roles. They championed causes related to equal access to education, making them vocal advocates for student rights and empowerment. Their actions not only gained them support but also encouraged fellow students to get involved in issues that affect the student community.

While running the affairs of the SRC, the two displayed an extraordinary ability to balance their leadership obligations with their academ-

ic goals. They stated that although it posed as a challenge to balance the two, various former presidents were available to offer their expertise and insights, allowing them a seamless run in the office. Their unwavering dedication to academic excellence resulted in the successful completion of their Diplomas in Marketing Management, serving as a testament to their unwavering commitment to personal and professional advancement.

"As of now, I am enrolling in an advanced diploma program while continuing to serve as the president. After my term, I anticipate being close to completing my course and actively seeking employment," said Hlongwani as he expresses his future goals. He further adds that he hopes to leave a legacy that advances free access to higher education for everyone.

In closing, the student leaders urged their peers to never lose sight of the primary purpose of university education and why they are here; and to fulfil their academic obligations and avoid growing complacent.

The graduation of Hlongwani and Shingange is also testament of the many available programs and interventions in place at VUT to support student leaders to flourish both in their leadership roles and academic commitment.

We wish to extend our sincerest congratulations and wish them luck in their future endeavours!

Finding Strength in Adversity: Sechaba Chabeli's physical disability shaped his IT career



MORE DETERMINED: Armed with a Postgraduate Diploma in Information Technology, Sechaba Chabeli is ready to make the IT industry more inclusive and accommodating for people with disabilities.

By: Tayron Mhongo

Born and bred in Koppies, a small town in the Free State, the 33-year-old Sechaba Chabeli was part of the cohort of graduates from the VUT's Faculty of Applied and Computer Sciences that received their Postgraduate Diplomas in Information Technology (IT) on 15 April 2024.

His passion for IT was ignited during his childhood and has been a driving force throughout his life. Beginning his academic journey at VUT, he pursued a Diploma in IT, which he completed in 2021. He then con-

tinued to excel, earning an Advanced Diploma in IT with Cum Laude in 2022, followed by a Postgraduate Diploma in IT in 2023.

Sechaba's experience of living with a physical disability has significantly influenced his approach to studying IT in several ways. One notable aspect is how it has heightened his awareness of the importance of making technology accessible to everyone, regardless of their abilities. Consequently, he dedicates his focus to studying the latest trends and techniques for creating inclusive technology solutions.

Reflecting on his journey, he shared, "My disability has taught me to be resilient and resourceful. Dealing with the challenges posed by my condition has made me stronger and better equipped to overcome obstacles in my academic and professional pursuits."

Chabeli was inspired to study IT by virtue of its potential to transform society and its impact on modern life. "From business to healthcare and education, IT plays a crucial role in shaping our world. This realization sparked my interest in the field, and I was determined to contribute to its advancement," he said.

Throughout his academic and professional journey, Chabeli encountered innumerable challenges, including a life-altering accident in 2013 that left his hands deformed due to third-degree burns. Despite undergoing numerous surgeries and treatments, he had to come to terms with the limitations imposed by his condition. Societal judgment and skepticism regarding his prospects for employment and personal relationships due to his physical disability presented additional challenges. However, with inner strength, resilience, and the support of loved ones, Chabeli was able to overcome these obstacles and achieve success. "In the workplace, I have been fortunate to work in environments that prioritize diversity and inclusion. I have not encountered any barriers or discrimination due to my disability, and I have been able to focus on my work and contribute effectively to my team," he added.

He continues to say, to make IT industry more inclusive and accommodating for people with disabilities, there should be development and implementation of technology-driven solutions that are accessible to individuals with varying disabilities. This, he says, could involve designing software, websites, and applications with features such as screen readers, voice recognition, keyboard shortcuts, and alternative input methods. He advises individuals living with disabilities who are considering a career in IT to believe in themselves and their abilities. "With passion, support from others, recognition of their strengths, adaptability, advocacy, networking, perseverance, and pride in their identity, they can pursue a successful career in IT despite any challenges posed by their disability."

His studies were funded through a combination of sources, including NSFAS, a bursary from ABSA, and support from the Bradshaw LeRoux Disability Inclusion Specialists.

Mr. Chabeli's dedication and talent led him to iLAB Quality, where he started as an intern and successfully secured a permanent position.

We congratulate Sechaba Chabeli and wish him continued success in the IT industry, and for him to inspire and pave the way for greater inclusivity and accessibility, empowering individuals of all abilities to thrive.



“I escaped death three times”: The remarkable story of a cancer survivor graduate

By: Tshepiso Kaibe

24-year-old Relebohile Msiza, stood as a true testament to defying all odds as she graduated for her National Diploma in Internal Auditing at VUT despite a gruesome battle against cancer. Hailing from the Vaal Triangle area, Msiza was nurtured within a Christian-oriented family, assuming the role of the eldest sibling, with her younger counterpart trailing by three years. She attributes this upbringing to her evolution into the woman of unwavering faith she stands as today.



Her journey set sail in high school when she took an interest in Accounting. “I have always been an ambitious, creative and enthusiastic individual who enjoyed the challenges and problem-solving which Maths encompasses. So, when I got to Grade 8 and started doing Economic and Management Sciences (EMS), I grew to love the mathematical nature of Accounting – the right or wrong of it, balancing the books and having to sit down and piece together just how numbers add up,” she says. This paved her way to furthering her studies in Internal Auditing at VUT in 2019 where she delved deeper into the intricacies of finance, honing her skills for the professional realm ahead.

Things, however, took an unfortunate turn of events for Msiza just three months into her first year of university. What began as a swollen foot one morning, which she initially dismissed as harmless, evolved into prolonged pain without a definitive diagnosis from medical experts. Msiza recalls turning to self-medication to alleviate the discomfort until eventually being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer called Chondroblastic Osteosarcoma after numerous medical consultations. As a result, the first course of action recommended by her healthcare providers was chemotherapy. Initially, she found herself grappling with a profound sense of denial, a sentiment she maintained until the following year. However, as time progressed, she gradually came to terms with the reality of her condition and necessity of the treatment. It was not until June 2020 that she finally decided to embark on her chemotherapy journey, a pivotal moment marking the beginning of a difficult yet hopeful path towards recovery.

Msiza expressed the severity of the side effects she underwent. “I became so sick to a point whereby I escaped death three times. I nearly died. I could not walk, bath myself or do anything. I wore nappies. The Doctors did not think I would make it. One night I went straight into ICU and woke up surrounded by a whole lot of doctors. I took five blood transfusions. I saw people dying every day and I was consistently wondering if I would be next”. Despite the preceding challenges, chemotherapy proved ineffective upon completion of the treatment course, necessitating the amputation of her leg in March 2021.

This, however, was not enough to deter her progress. Her perseverance and dedication saw her through as she graduated in the 2024 Autumn Graduations.

Msiza attributes her success to the support of both her parents; sister and mentor, Cindy Nhlapo; two friends, Mantema and Monica Koro as well as the Student Christian Organization (SCO-VUT). She further added that the NSFAS Disability Unit together with Dr. Gauta Maseko, Head of Department (HOD) under the faculty of management sciences and several lecturers have all played an instrumental role in ensuring she completes her studies with ease.

She advises individuals facing similar challenges to embrace acceptance of their imperfections, foster confidence, and take pride in overcoming obstacles as differently abled individuals. Encouraging strong belief in a bigger plan. We wish to congratulate Msiza on her remarkable accomplishment and wish her success as she aims to further pursue an Advanced Diploma in Internal Auditing and possibly Honours to achieve the Certified Internal Auditor (CIA) accreditation.

DEFYING ALL ODDS: Relebohile Msiza, a cancer survivor who graduated for National Diploma in Internal Auditing.



Family celebrates achievements of one of their own amidst tragedy that befell him



PRIDE AMIDST GRIEF: Family of the late Melvyn Takatso Maphoto pose for a photo while holding his qualification.

By: Tayron Mhlongo

While the graduation ceremony provided an exciting moment for students as they ascended the stage to receive their hard-earned qualifications, the mood quickly took a sombre turn when Melvyn Takatso Mosenya Maphoto’s mother went to receive her son’s posthumous qualification. Maphoto, described as a remarkable student who showed continuous focus and commitment to achieving academic distinction while pursuing his post-graduate studies, had been involved a fatal vehicle accident. With determination and diligence, he would obtain the much desired Cum Laude (Posthumus) Postgraduate Diploma.

Maphoto’s family was drawn from a peaceful atmosphere of Tzaneen, Limpopo, to the cherished walls of VUT’s Desmond Tutu Great Hall as word of his unexpected death spread widely. Their journey was marked not just by grief but also by pride as they came together to honor their son’s extraordinary accomplishment and persistent spirit.

Melvyn Maphoto’s life was a testament to his passion for IT. His

mother Audrey Maphoto recounted his unyielding determination, sharing his words, “Mom, I won’t rest until I get the yellow belt.” His enthusiastic devotion to his academics and his constant pursuit of perfection were summed up in this comment.

Beyond his academic capabilities, Maphoto will be remembered for his endearing qualities. He was a resolute individual, always striving to uplift others and serve his community. His family fondly remembers him as a loving, hardworking individual whose spirit was a source of inspiration to all who knew him.

VUT and Maphoto’s family were left to reflect on the life of a young man whose potential was cut short but whose legacy would live on as the sun set on the sorrowful graduations. His memory would continue to inspire those who knew him, and his story would serve as a reminder of the importance of dedication, passion, and the pursuit of excellence.



Student graduates Cum Laude and bags Top Achievement Award despite losing mother in first year



Rialivhuwa Mutheiwana, Diploma in Human Resource Management (Cum Laude) graduate and Top Student Achievement Award winner, flanked by prof Khehla Ndlovu, VUT Vice Chancellor and Principal (right) and Xolani Mawande, CEO of SA Board for People Practices (SABPP)

By: Thabisang Thebeeapelo

In a showcase of academic dedication and excellence, Rialivhuwa Mutheiwana aged 23, did not only leave the recent VUT's Autumn Graduations, with a Diploma in Human Resource Management (Cum Laude) in one hand, but she also walked away with a Top Student Achievement Award on the other.

Rialivhuwa was born into a household of four daughters and is now the proud mother of a lovely 10-month-old baby girl. Her story is one of victory over difficulty. She developed a strong interest in reading and writing from a young age, which would eventually shape her academic endeavors and feed her thirst for knowledge. Raised in Germiston but now living in Brakpan, she has overcome numerous challenges through dedication and determination – she is currently pursuing an Advanced Diploma in same field.

She sees the award as more than just academic acclaim; she says it symbolises a promise fulfilled for her late mother, who tragically passed away during her first year of study in 2021. Despite enduring pain of loss and many other obstacles, she remained consistent in her

determination to honor her mother's memory and achieve academic success.

"I knew I cum lauded, but I didn't know that I was a top student; it took me by surprise, and it feels amazing to be recognized for my accomplishments. I hope this will open a lot of doors for me," she said. "Every single day from 2021 contributed to this achievement. I understood the goal and even if it came through a lot of tears, trials, and tribulations, I constantly had to give my best."

Reflecting on her journey, Rialivhuwa recognizes the crucial support and encouragement she received from her family, particularly her sister, Mulalo Mutheiwana, who she says her unflinching belief in her potential and constant support drove her ahead, even at the darkest of times.

The award was sponsored by the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP)

Celebrating remarkable keynote speakers and distinguished guests who graced the VUT Autumn Graduation ceremonies.



By: **Puleng Maphisa**

One of the highlights of graduations is the lineup of keynote speakers and distinguished guests that the University can draw to not only witness and share in the joy of the graduating class, but also to inspire, impart wisdom, experiences, and insights to them.

This year's VUT autumn graduation ceremonies, were particularly exceptional, having been graced by an array of notable personalities from industry, government, as well as civic and development organisations, making every session truly memorable and enriching.

Spread across the sixteen sessions over five days, these included Cllrs Peter Texeria and Sipho Radebe, Executive Mayors of Midvaal and Emfuleni Local Municipalities, respectively.

Another guest was Mr Jaco Verwey, President of the Gauteng Triangle Chamber of Commerce (GTCCOC), a premiere voice for multi-sectoral businesses in the Vaal Triangle with a strong focus on creating and enabling an environment for economic prosperity.

Additional highlight was the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT)'s President, Mr. Elvin Harris who not only lent his presence, but also sponsored the Top Achieving Student of Diploma in Logistics. His generosity did not end there, he also extended a free membership to the winner, welcoming her into the field of young professionals.

Furthermore, Mr Harris also offered the Top 3 performing students a complimentary year-long mentorship program, ensuring their continued growth and success in the field.

In another act of kindness and commitment to rewarding excellence, Mr Enrico du Plessis, representing the Marketing Association of South Africa (MASA)'s Board of Directors, attended the graduating class in the field of marketing, and presented a trophy to the Top Achieving Student, sponsored by his organisation.

Mr Xolani Mawande, the CEO of the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP) gave a keynote address at the graduation session of Human Resources Management where his organisation also sponsored the Top Student Achievement Award

Although not all of them gave talks, their presence added a unique dimension to the graduation ceremonies. Those who gave keynote addresses, offered diverse perspectives and inspired the next generation of leaders by sharing personal anecdotes, valuable lessons learned from their journeys, and words of encouragement for the graduates as they embark on new adventures and challenges.

As we celebrate this year's autumn graduations, we also extend our gratitude to this group of eminent personalities – we hope their presence left a lasting impact on our graduates.

Congratulatory Message Class of 2024



Dear graduate

On behalf of the Vaal University of Technology (VUT), it is with immense pleasure and pride that I extend my heartfelt congratulations to each one of you on this special occasion.

Today marks a significant milestone in your journey, one that you have worked tirelessly towards and one that deserves celebration and recognition in every way possible. Just as it is a moment of pride, graduation is also a time of reflection, and anticipation for what lies ahead. This day is not just about receiving your qualification; it is a testament to your growth, both academically and personally. Throughout your time at VUT, you have not only gained knowledge but also developed critical thinking skills, creativity, and a sense of responsibility towards society.

As VUT Vice Chancellor and Principal, I am privileged to witness the culmination of your hard work, dedication, and perseverance. You have shown not only academic excellence but also the qualities of resilience, determination, and adaptability that are essential for success in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. As you step into the next phase of your life – be it furthering your studies, entering the workforce, or pursuing your passions, remember that the skills and experiences you have gained here will guide you towards achieving your dreams and making a positive impact to the world. Always remain curious, continue to learn, and never shy away from challenges, for it is through challenges that we grow and evolve. Be courageous in pursuing your goals, compassionate in your interactions, and ethical in your decisions.

May I add that your graduation comes at a critical time when VUT is celebrating twenty years as a University of Technology. Throughout these years, VUT has and continues to offer an expansive catalogue of industry tailored undergraduate and postgraduate programmes which span the fields of Applied and Computer Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Human Sciences and Management Sciences. Our diverse Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) caters to a wide range of students with interests and ambitions in various disciplines, just like you.

Reaching two decades is not only a significant milestone for VUT, but it also testament to the institution's dedication to education, innovation, and excellence in the field of technology. Such anniversaries are not only moments to reflect on past achievements but also to look forward to future advancements and contributions to the world of technology and academia. Today we look back with pride at that fateful year in 2004, which saw the restructuring of the higher education landscape, leading to the birth of VUT. Since then, the institution has seen significant growth in its activities and reach – and you are a greater part of our story of access to success.

As I said, graduations are also a good time for reflection, and therefore, I encourage you to reflect on your journey thus far and recognize the support that you have received from your lecturers, academic advisors, fellow students, family, and friends. All of them have been instrumental in contributing to your career aspirations, even in the minimalistic way possible, and it is important to express your gratitude to them. Let's give them a BIG round of applause!

Lastly, the world awaits your talents, ideas, and contributions. Go out there with confidence, courage, and a determination to make a difference.

Once again, on behalf of the VUT community, I wish you all the best for a bright and fulfilling future. May your journey be filled with success, happiness, and countless opportunities.

Congratulations once again, graduates. We are immensely proud of you!

Thank you.

**Prof Stephen Khehla Ndlovu,
Vice-Chancellor and Principal**

WELCOME TO THE MAVUTI SHOP,

The maVUTi Shop is a physical and digital space where VUT showcases and sells its products directly to customers. The shop's significance is delivering on Strategic Objective 8: To Improve the VUT Image, establish the VUT brand identity, communicate its values, and create a consistent brand experience and presence.

The maVUTi Shop is instrumental in promoting the new brand to staff, students, and Alumni. The visual application of the new merchandise inspires a renewed sense of belonging and assists in the buy-in of the VUT brand amongst internal and external stakeholders (brand equity). A variety of good quality branded merchandise will encourage brand loyalty.

The Marketing & Brand Manager, who resides in the Advancement Department, manages the maVUTi Shop and makes it accessible to all VUT stakeholders. In addition, the shop will assist with promoting and protecting our brand, ensuring adherence and compliance with the Brand Style Guide and the Brand & Corporate Identity Policy (available on the VUT website).

According to the Brand & Corporate Identity policy, all purchases by internal stakeholders (faculties, departments, units, SRC, and student organizations) are centralized at the maVUTi Shop. This 360-degree service ensures that the Marketing & Brand Manager has complete control over product quality and uniformity in terms of brand application.

PURCHASING PROCEDURES

No cash payments.

Card payments are accepted.

Internal transfers via requisition. Obtain a quotation from the maVUTi Shop as a supporting document and verify stock levels.

TRADING HOURS

Monday - Thursday:

09:00 - 15:30

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Vaal University of Technology, Vanderbijlpark Campus, AN Building



VUT Ekhaya Alumni



Alumni Relations Office / Pre-Alumni

The mandate of Alumni Relations is to engage and inspire VUT alumni to stay connected to their alma mater in support of the Vaal University of Technology's vision and mission to contribute to its success.

To make this a reality; the student experience is very important. It is best practice to meaningfully engage the student to build a long-sustained relationship before they graduate.

The Alumni Relations Office introduced Pre-Alumni to prepare students in this regard;

- To educate students on how to participate in pre-alumni activities
 - To profile students (high-achievers) and assist them to grow their talents
 - To introduce students to alumni networks, functions and events where they meet alumni
 - To engage students in career-driven activities, seminars, mentoring and coaching, etc.
 - To support students in their academic and extra mural initiatives to enhance memorable student experience
 - To communicate and update students with university affairs that affect them and alumni as a student of Vaal University of Technology, you have joined thousands of VUT graduates known as "Ma-VUTi"
- When you graduate, you will join our proud VUT graduates that we profile in our news bulletin, web, social media and publications.

We also profile you to advertise VUT faculty-based structures which links you to professional bodies where thousands of alumni are affiliated. The profiles would be precise to your qualification and career path (Milestones and achievements).

Your participation and engagement is highly valued.

- VUT Pre-Alumni
- VUT Pre-Alumni
- VUT_Pre_Alumni



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