



# higher education & training

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## Joint UCDP Send-Off Colloquium

Minutes

16-17 OCT  
2024



NELSON MANDELA  
UNIVERSITY

The inaugural Joint-University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) Send-Off Colloquium marked a momentous occasion in the advancement of higher education in South Africa. Hosted as a celebration of the achievements of the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP), the University Staff Development Programme (USDP), and the Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme (NESP) graduates, the event served as a platform to reflect on the transformative impact of these Programmes. The colloquium brought together esteemed academics, university leaders, and key stakeholders to honour the dedication and perseverance of the graduates and to acknowledge the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) role in fostering excellence, equity, and transformation in the academic sector.

Prof Azwinndini Muronga, delivered the welcoming speech, setting the tone for the day by celebrating milestones and emphasising the importance of continued progress in higher education.

## **DAY 1**

### **1. OPENING – WELCOMING SPEECH**

**09:30-09:50**

**Professor Azwinndini Muronga, Deputy Vice-Chancellor:  
Research, Innovation and Internationalisation from  
Nelson Mandela University**

Prof Azwinndini Muronga opened the colloquium by welcoming all attendees and speakers to the inaugural Joint-UCDP Send-Off Colloquium. He described the event as a celebration of the transformative academic journey of its participants, emphasising its significance as a milestone in the development of higher education in South Africa.

He noted that the event marks an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the graduates and on the vision of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). At the heart of DHET's mission lies the goal of creating an inclusive and equitable higher education landscape. Prof Muronga highlighted that the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) has been central to this vision, identifying and nurturing young academic talent. He stated that nGAP ensures universities remain vibrant, diverse, and responsive to societal needs.

Prof Muronga emphasised that nGAP graduates exemplify the programme's vision by not only enriching the academic community but also contributing significantly to the transformation of the higher education system. Similarly, he acknowledged the role of the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP), which has provided essential support for academic staff pursuing doctoral studies through the University Staff Development Programme (USDP). He described the UCDP as a crucial platform for enhancing research capacity in universities and fostering intellectual progress.

He further acknowledged the accomplishments of those who have completed their doctoral studies through the USDP, noting that these scholars have reached the

pinnacle of academic achievement. Their work, he said, contributes to a growing body of knowledge that will influence and shape future generations. In addition, Prof Muronga praised the NESP as another DHET initiative fostering academic excellence. He pointed out that the NESP has empowered emerging scholars to refine their skills, preparing them to excel in teaching, research, and community engagement. He characterised the Programme as an example of DHET's commitment to excellence, equity, and transformation within higher education.

Prof Muronga reflected on the broader importance of transformation in higher education, describing it as a critical necessity for addressing the legacy of inequality and exclusion. He emphasised that transformation ensures universities reflect the diversity of society, promote innovation, and provide equitable opportunities for all. He stressed that the impact of transformation extends beyond academic institutions, contributing to the development of a more inclusive, knowledgeable, and socially conscious society.

In his remarks, Prof Muronga expressed appreciation to DHET for its commitment to the academic sector. He also acknowledged the leadership and support of Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors, whose guidance, he noted, has been instrumental in the success of these transformative Programmes.

To the graduates of nGAP, USDP, and NESP, Prof Muronga commended their dedication, perseverance, and passion. He highlighted their role as highly skilled academics, researchers, and thought leaders who are poised to make significant contributions to higher education and society. He emphasised that the impact of their work will extend beyond the academic world, fostering progress and equity in South Africa's broader social landscape.

Prof Muronga concluded by reminding the graduates that the Send-Off Colloquium marks both an ending and a new beginning. He urged them to carry forward the lessons learned, the relationships built, and the knowledge gained throughout their journey. He described them not only as graduates but as leaders, scholars, and changemakers who will help define the future of higher education in South Africa.

He ended with a note of gratitude, thanking the graduates for their contributions to the academic community and for choosing to make a difference. He expressed confidence in the remarkable impact they will have as they embark on the next chapter of their journey.

## **2. TESTIMONIALS OF nGAP, NESP, USDP LECTURERS**

### **09:50-10:10**

**Dr Lerato Mdaka, Senior Lecturer in the School of Management Sciences at the North West University (NWU) – nGAP Lecturer**

As one of the graduates of the nGAP, Dr Lerato Mdaka shared a heartfelt account of her journey through the Programme. Her testimonial highlighted the transformative impact of nGAP on her academic career, providing unparalleled opportunities for growth and development. From attending international courses to receiving prestigious awards, Dr Mdaka's experience exemplifies the Programme's vision of fostering academic excellence and enriching global narratives with African perspectives.

Dr Lerato Mdaka shared her experiences as a participant in the nGAP. She described the journey as transformative, particularly in laying the foundation for her academic career and providing unparalleled opportunities for development. A defining moment in her journey was attending the Open Innovation and Open Business Model international course in Barcelona, Spain.

Dr Mdaka reflected on how being surrounded by some of the world's most cited scholars was both inspiring and humbling. The experience gave her the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions from a South African perspective. She described this as more than just a learning experience, as it highlighted her responsibility to contribute to transforming the research landscape by integrating African perspectives into Western philosophies. This, she said, reinforced the necessity of continually challenging conventional theories by incorporating the lived experiences of African scholars. One of the key objectives of the nGAP, as Dr Mdaka noted, is to enrich global narratives with African contexts. A pivotal moment in her academic career was receiving the National Research Foundation (NRF) Research Development Grant during her first two years in the Programme. The grant, specifically designed for emerging academics, enabled her to carefully select and collaborate with leading supervisors in her area of study, significantly enhancing her research journey.

She also highlighted the impact of international teaching mobility opportunities provided through the Programme. These opportunities allowed her to engage with institutions and experts in various countries, immersing her in diverse academic environments. This exposure contributed significantly to her professional development and enriched her pedagogical strategies. By incorporating global perspectives into her teaching, she has fostered an inclusive and internationally aware learning environment for her students.

Throughout her nGAP journey, Dr Mdaka shared that one of the most rewarding moments was being recognised for her contributions to academia. She received the Excellence Award in Community Engagement and the Excellence Award in Teaching and Learning from North-West University (NWU). These accolades, she noted, were a testament to the supportive and conducive environment fostered by the nGAP, which enabled her to achieve such milestones.

Upon reflecting on her journey, Dr Mdaka expressed heartfelt gratitude to her mentor, who identified her potential in her third year. His guidance and unwavering belief in her abilities were instrumental in setting her on the path to success. She described the nGAP as a cornerstone of her academic development, providing a holistic approach to both professional and personal growth.

Dr Mdaka concluded by acknowledging that the nGAP has equipped her with the resilience and adaptability necessary to navigate the dynamic challenges of academia. She expressed pride in her journey and gratitude for the opportunities it has afforded her. As she advances in her academic and professional career, she will continue to cherish the experiences and lessons gained through the nGAP.

## **Ms Nosipho Dlamini, University of KwaZulu Natal NESP Scholar**

Ms. Nosipho Dlamini shared her inspiring journey as a participant in the National Excellence in Scholarship Programme (NESP). She recounted how the Programme was introduced to her by her supervisor, who recognised her potential and encouraged her to apply. Throughout her time in the Programme, Ms Dlamini shared the significant impact that NESP had on her academic and professional development. From lecturing a group of young engineers to participating in an international mobility Programme in Spain. Her experience with NESP has been both transformative and enriching.

Ms Nosipho Dlamini began her testimonial by recounting how she first learned about the NESP. Her supervisor, recognising her potential and interest in academia, introduced her to the opportunity while she was in the process of conceptualising her research on integrated climate change adaptation strategies. Encouraged by her supervisor to apply, she successfully gained admission into the Programme, a decision that marked a turning point in her academic journey.

Reflecting on her experiences, Ms Dlamini highlighted many memorable moments during her time in the NESP Programme. One experience was lecturing a group of young, enthusiastic engineering students. Initially, the task felt daunting, but their inquisitiveness and respect created an enjoyable and rewarding teaching environment. This experience, she noted, was a defining moment that reinforced her passion for academia.

Another highlight of her journey was participating in a short-term international mobility programme in Spain, where she delved into system dynamic modelling. During her time there, she not only developed valuable technical skills in modelling but also immersed herself in the vibrant culture of Spain. She described the experience as both memorable and transformative, combining academic growth with personal enrichment.

Ms Dlamini emphasised that the NESP programme truly lives up to its name by nurturing emerging scholars. She encouraged undergraduates with a passion for academia to consider the Programme, describing it as a comprehensive support system for aspiring academics. She particularly appreciated the mentoring aspect, which she distinguished from traditional supervision. Mentoring, she explained, focuses on the individual's long-term career development, providing guidance that is crucial for a smooth transition into academia.

Expressing her gratitude, Ms Dlamini thanked the DHET for implementing the NESP. She credited the programme for enabling her to attain a Master of Science (MSc) degree while also acquiring both hard and soft skills essential for advancing her academic career. She concluded by wishing the programme continued success in nurturing future scholars and contributing to the transformation of the academic landscape.

## **Dr Mpho Magwalivha, University of Venda (Univen) USDP Scholar**

Dr Mpho Magwalivah, a scholar of the University Staff Development Programme (USDP), shared his journey of overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities through the support of the programme. He highlighted a key moment in his academic career when he worked on a collaborative project involving the University of Venda (Univen), the University of the Free State, and the University of Virginia.

The PhD experience, as Dr Magwalivah explained, had its share of challenges. When he first registered for his PhD, he struggled to secure sufficient funding for his research. Despite his efforts to seek external funding, he was only able to secure a minimal amount from the university, which covered just a few essential items to support his work. Feeling stranded and uncertain, Dr Magwalivah met a professor who introduced him to the USDP and encouraged him to apply. He did so and was successfully awarded the funding that would change the course of his research journey.

The USDP proved to be invaluable, as it provided Dr Magwalivah with the necessary resources to conduct thorough analysis for his research. With the additional funding, he was able to gather sufficient data, which led to the production of articles for publication. The Programme's support was crucial in propelling his research forward, allowing him to overcome obstacles that would have otherwise hindered his progress.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the programme was the opportunity it provided for international exposure. Dr Magwalivah was able to travel to the University of Virginia, where he met with researchers, presented his ideas, and formed promising collaborations. The mentorship he received from established researchers at the University of Virginia played a pivotal role in his development.

Reflecting on his experience, Dr Magwalivah expressed deep gratitude to the USDP, acknowledging that without the funding, his research would have stagnated, and he may not have been able to complete his PhD on time. With the Programme's support, he successfully completed his doctoral studies and published three international journal articles. He credited the USDP with making this achievement possible, and he is immensely grateful for the opportunities it has afforded him.

### **3. PURPOSE OF THE EVENT**

**10:10-10:30**

#### **MS MANDISA CAKWE - DIRECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE (DHET)**

Ms Mandisa Cakwe noted that the celebration was dedicated to honouring the achievements of instilled and prospective academics who have worked diligently over the years. Their resilience, particularly during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has been commendable. Despite the difficulties faced, these individuals persevered and achieved remarkable milestones. DHET extended heartfelt congratulations, acknowledging that their hard work has indeed paid off.

The event highlighted the accomplishments of participants who successfully completed subprogrammes under the University Capacity Development Programme, including nGAP, NESP, and USDP. The dedication and commitment of these academics have not only advanced their individual careers but have also contributed significantly to the realisation of the DHET's vision. The UCDP aims to transform teaching, learning, research, and leadership across higher education institutions to enhance quality and foster systemic transformation. One of its key focus areas is the development of university staff, achieved through collaborative efforts with all 26 public universities in South Africa.

The implementation of the UCDP subprogrammes is supported by leading partner universities, each responsible for specific initiatives:

- Nelson Mandela University oversees the implementation of the nGAP
- Rhodes University leads the NESP
- The University of Pretoria coordinates the USDP

These Programmes focus on recruiting and supporting competent scholars as new academics, building a robust pipeline of future academics, and supporting current university staff in acquiring postgraduate qualifications. The recruitment process targets candidates aspiring to enter academia while also providing developmental opportunities for employed academics in need of further training.

The success of these initiatives has been made possible through contributions not only from the DHET but also from participating universities and other partners. This collaborative effort has been essential in realising the vision of transforming the higher education system in South Africa.

The event also marked a milestone celebration for the participants who completed these programmes. It provided a platform for them to share their research findings and reflect on their journeys within the Programmes. The presentations of their research findings, scheduled for the following day, represent a testament to the efforts and achievements of these academics.

In conclusion, the DHET expressed excitement and pride in these collective

achievements, emphasising that such successes are a result of collaboration across the higher education system. The DHET acknowledged that no single entity could achieve this alone and that partnerships between all stakeholders, including universities, the DHET, and other role players that are critical to realising transformation. This celebration marked not only an individual triumph for the academics involved but also a significant milestone for the higher education system and the country as a whole.

#### **4. KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

### **MR PHILLIP TSHABALALA, CHIEF DIRECTOR FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT (DHET)**

**10:30-11:00**

The keynote address was opened by Mr Phillip Tshabalala, who set the tone for the event with an inspiring and reflective speech. His address emphasised the critical role of higher education in addressing South Africa's pressing challenges, including inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Mr Tshabalala highlighted the government's priorities and how they align with the goals of higher education, particularly in transforming the system to better serve the nation.

He commended the achievements of the participants in programmes such as the UCDP and its subprogrammes, NESP, nGAP, and USDP. Mr Tshabalala called on academics to take responsibility for driving transformation in the sector and using their experiences and expertise to contribute meaningfully to the betterment of the system and society as a whole. The address served as a call to action for collaboration, mentorship, and innovation within the academic community. It underscored the importance of continued investment in staff development, international exposure, and partnerships to achieve a higher education system that is inclusive, responsive, and globally competitive.

Mr Tshabalala commenced the keynote address by thanking all those in attendance. He reflected on the government of national unity recently noting how it has completed its first 100 days in office, during which it outlined three key priorities:

- Inclusive growth and job creation.
- Reducing poverty and addressing the high cost of living.
- Building a capable state that is ethical and developmental.

These priorities resonate strongly with the role of institutions of higher education and training, such as universities. The nation relies on universities to help achieve these goals, ensuring that their success translates into tangible benefits for the country.

As we celebrate the achievements of today's graduates, it is our belief that their accomplishments must contribute to progress in the higher education sector. The impact of these achievements should be felt across the breadth and depth of our country and in their respective fields of study and specialisation. These individuals

play a critical role in uplifting the standard of universities and driving transformation to address historical inequalities embedded in the higher education system.

Staff development is central to ensuring the quality of higher education. Institutions depend on the expertise and dedication of their staff to deliver effective services. The quality of academic staff is fundamental to achieving transformation imperatives and measuring the effectiveness of higher education institutions in contributing to national priorities. The transformation of the higher education sector has been institutionalised through initiatives led by the DHET. These initiatives have steadily facilitated the allocation of resources to support Programmes that drive transformation. The UCDP, which has yielded concrete outcomes through collective efforts by the department and the broader higher education sector.

The Send-Off Colloquium was noted as a celebration these outcomes, including the achievements of academics who have successfully completed the NESP, nGAP, and USDP. These accomplishments include earning master's and doctoral degrees while working full-time. While it is possible to balance work and studies, the challenges of managing workloads, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and finding time to study can be significant. The DHET has devised strategies to make this journey more manageable for academics. These include reducing teaching workloads, providing tuition support, offering opportunities for international exposure, and ensuring financial contributions from universities to supplement Programme costs.

The success of these arrangements has been made possible through collaboration between the DHET, higher education institutions, and partners such as the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) and the British Council. Gratitude is extended to these partners for their invaluable support in implementing these transformative programmes.

The beneficiaries of these programmes stand as a testament to the collective interest in academic development and success. The investment made in these initiatives has not gone to waste; instead, it has contributed significantly to national aspirations and the economic development of our country. The increasing demand for higher education and the globalisation of the sector compel us to prioritize staff development. Moreover, the rapidly changing demands of the labour market require higher education institutions to remain responsive to national, regional, and global needs.

Continuous development of university staff is, therefore, inevitable. However, this comes at a time when government resources are declining, necessitating stronger partnerships to pool resources and avoid wastage and duplication.

This gathering provides an opportunity for attendees to connect, identify common interests, and forge collaborations and partnerships. These collaborations should extend beyond individual universities to foster inter-university cooperation in developing human resources in higher education. Such partnerships are vital in an era of limited resources and can help those at the beginning of their academic careers benefit from the greater experience of others.

As we conclude, a call is made for academics to become agents of transformation who willingly mentor others. One of the goals of higher education institutions and their staff is to act as agents of social change and justice. Social justice involves building the capacities and capabilities of individuals who, in turn, influence their environments to drive meaningful change and address the triple challenges facing our country: poverty, inequality, and unemployment. These challenges are felt daily in our communities, and it is through education and transformation that we can make a significant difference.

It is important to shed light on the lives and livelihoods of those we serve, ensuring they are empowered to rise above the triple challenges of inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Today's achievements mark the beginning of what DHET hopes and expects to see.

For the DHET, transformation of the system is non-negotiable. This transformation process presents an opportunity to rethink educational practices and work towards building a higher education system that is of high quality, aligned with its core mandates of teaching, learning, research, and community engagement. While strides have been made, there is still much to do. To this end, all the programmes under the UCDP include an international component. This component not only exposes academics to global best practices but also provides a platform to showcase African innovation and contribute globally while retaining African values and essence.

The DHET is working towards a higher education system that is demographically representative of the country's diversity. It aims to provide equitable opportunities for access and success for all students and staff, fostering a system that is both functional and caring. This system should be diverse, differentiated, inclusive, and well-articulated, with relevance and responsiveness to local, regional, and global contexts. Moreover, it should be research-productive, drive innovation, and produce educated, critical, and employable citizens who are effective leaders for the future.

The DHET strongly believes that the support mechanisms provided to lecturers through these programmes have significantly strengthened the academic profile of South African universities. This is evidenced by the growing number of academics who have obtained doctoral degrees, an increase in research publications, and the development of senior academics such as senior lecturers and professors. Academics developed through UCDP programmes are also making contributions to other universities in South Africa, particularly through the international mobility grants and resources provided by their institutions.

The DHET remains committed to addressing ongoing challenges such as staff-to-student ratios, large class sizes, and the graduation pipeline for postgraduate studies. While one programme alone cannot resolve all these issues, collaborative efforts from academics, universities, and stakeholders are essential for contributing to the societal and economic development of the country.

The DHET is steadfast in its commitment to supporting the UCDP until the transformation imperatives articulated in the Higher Education Act of 1997 are fully

achieved. Academics are encouraged to reinvest in the universities that have invested in them by mentoring students and supporting their institutions after completing these programmes. This is especially critical for historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) and technical universities, which rely on your contributions to advance their missions. The DHET is aware of the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and stands ready to support those affected. With perseverance, fortitude, and institutional backing, success is attainable.

In conclusion, the Department congratulated lecturers on a significant milestone, achievements, despite the many obstacles. The DHET looks forward to seeing the positive impact of lecturers in the higher education sector. We reaffirm our commitment to supporting the UCDP and the transformation of South Africa's higher education landscape.

## **5. APPRECIATION FROM PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT**

**11:00-11:15**

**DR SIBUSISO SENZANI, UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU NATAL**

Dr Senzani began his testimonial by reflecting on his upbringing and the experiences that shaped his academic journey. Raised in the East Rand township of Vosloorus by two loving and supportive parents, he was encouraged from an early age to be curious and to explore the world around him. This curiosity manifested strongly in his childhood, often leading to trouble as he constantly sought to understand how things worked.

By the time he reached high school, his curiosity had found its focus in biology, as he was fascinated by the complexity of the human body. However, in his community, an interest in biology typically pointed to a career in medicine. When his application to medical school was rejected, he pivoted to a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree, still hoping to one day become a doctor. Looking back, Dr Senzani now fully appreciates that rejection, as it allowed him to discover his passion for research. During his first year of university, he realised that his future lay in understanding the core mechanisms of the human body, particularly through genetics. He pursued this passion and completed his PhD in 2018.

After completing his PhD, Dr Senzani faced the harsh reality of South Africa's high unemployment rate. Determined to find opportunities, he applied widely. A colleague informed him about the nGAP, and he successfully applied. He described securing the position as a huge relief and a turning point in his career. Dr Senzani spoke highly of the positive impact the nGAP has had on his life. He highlighted three key opportunities the programme provided:

- Proving his value: nGAP gave him the chance to demonstrate his abilities and show people what he could contribute.

- Expressing himself: the programme created a platform for him to showcase who he is and the value he brings.
- Opening doors: nGAP provided a rare opportunity to enter academia, which is often hindered by limited positions and slow turnover rates in departments.

He emphasised the importance of such programmes in creating chances that might otherwise not exist. In his department, for instance, three new hires were only possible due to retirements. For someone like him, fresh out of a PhD, opportunities were scarce, and programmes like nGAP are essential for opening doors to aspiring academics.

One of the critical supports he highlighted was seed funding, which he described as the foundation for his success. Without funding, he noted, it was impossible to get research off the ground. Through nGAP, he was able to secure initial resources that led to further grants, collaborations, and multiple publications.

Among his proudest achievements is his role in training young people. Dr Senzani takes pride in mentoring students, ensuring that they become impactful and employable members of society. Every student he has trained, whether at the master's or honours level, is either employed or pursuing further studies. He views his contribution to the next generation of scholars as one of the most meaningful aspects of his career. However, he acknowledged challenges along the way, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic struck during the second year of his early academic career, shutting down many activities and creating significant disruptions.

Dr Senzani also shared suggestions for improving nGAP. He expressed the importance of events like this one, where participants can come together annually to collaborate, share ideas, and uplift one another. He also noted the value of including early participants in such gatherings to provide inspiration and guidance to newer members.

Reflecting on his journey, Dr Senzani likened it to his PhD experience, where his supervisor emphasised that the project was his responsibility to shape and take forward. He applied this mindset to his nGAP opportunity, using it as a platform to build something impactful. With gratitude and pride, he concluded by affirming the life-changing impact of the Programme.

## **6. AWARDS**

### **11:30-13:00**

The awards ceremony was a celebratory moment, recognising the outstanding achievements of participants who have successfully completed the NESP, nGAP, and USDP programmes. These individuals, who represent the future of academia in South Africa, were honoured for their dedication, perseverance, and commitment to excellence in their respective fields.

NESP	nGAP	USDP
Tlotlo Radebe (CUT)	Nolwazi Qumbisa (CUT)	Thembinkosi Sotsaka (DUT)
Emilia Sarupdeo (DUT)	Sizwe Siwela (CUT)	Mmatshuene Segooa (TUT)
Yonela Ndila (NMU)	Thandokuhle Khoza (DUT)	Vuyelwa Dondolo (UFH)
Innocentia Zintl (NMU)	Jey Nyalungu (DUT)	Moeketsi Dlamini (UFH)
Silindile Mkize (MUT)	Mulalo Makhuvha (NMU)	Sithembele Ndovela (UFS)
Samkele Monakali (MUT)	Lerato Mdaka (NWU)	Siphokazi Gatyeni (UJ)
Thabang Chama (TUT)	Taryn De Vega (RU)	Zanele Matsane (UJ)
Anouschka Swart (TUT)	Thapelo Tselapedi (RU)	Puleng Motshoane (UJ)
Nohaya Esona (UFH)	Sabashnee Govender-Davies (SMU)	Letebele Mphahlele (UJ)
Phindile Shinga (UFH)	Kesentsen Mahlaba (SMU)	Lutendo Muremi (UJ)
Bulelwa Stemele (UFH)	Martha Kabinde-Machate (TUT)	Lethiwe Nzama-Sithole (UJ)
Chumasande Dapula (UFS)	Rudzani Glen Muthelo (TUT)	Sebonkile Thaba (UJ)
Manamele Mashabela (UJ)	Thivhafuni Tshishonge (TUT)	Nosipho Bele (UKZN)
Sphumelele Sibuta (UJ)	Xolisa Guzula (UCT)	Reginald Govender (UKZN)
Nosipho Dlamini (UKZN)	Musa Nxele (UCT)	Leevina Iyer (UKZN)
Tebogo Mokwana (UL)	Jarlen Keet (UFS)	Leevina Iyer (UKZN)
Kukhanyile Mali (UWC)	Vuyiswa Letsoko (UJ)	Vusi Msiza (UKZN)
Faranani Gethe (WITS)	Lerato Ndabezitha (UJ)	Nokukhanya Ndlovu (UKZN)
Lerato Mapela (WITS)	Lebo Phiri (UJ)	Ndumiso Ngidi (UKZN)
Vuledzani Badetswana (WSU)	Siyabonga Dlamini (UKZN)	Thabile Zondi (UKZN)
	Viloshin Govender (UKZN)	Nontobeko Khumalo (UNISA)
	Katelyn Johnson (UKZN)	Lungile Luthuli (UNISA)
	December Mpanza (UKZN)	Elliot Ndlovu (UNISA)
	Ntombifuthi Ngubane (UKZN)	Julia Mafumo (UNIVEN)
	Sibusiso Senzani (UKZN)	Mpho Magwalivha (UNIVEN)
	Tsetselenane Mdhluli (UL)	Taurayi Chinaka (UNIZULU)
	Kheto Nemutandani (UL)	Primrose Khumalo (UNIZULU)
	Aluwani Ramalata (UL)	Siphelele Makhubu (UNIZULU)
	Themba Lukhele (UMP)	Sello Mokoena (UNIZULU)
	Sukoluhle Mazwane (UMP)	Zanele Msweli (UNIZULU)
	Nyiko Khoza (UNISA)	Aviwe Sondlo (UNIZULU)
	Gloria Ledwaba (UNISA)	Zanele Msweli (UNIZULU)
	Mpho Maboja (UNISA)	Taurayi Chinaka (UNIZULU)
	Nomampondo Magwa (UNISA)	Sibonelo Blose (UP)
	Zolile Mguda (UNISA)	Makhaya Malema (UWC)
	Raseputuka Saasa (UNISA)	
	Phumzile Sibisi (UNISA)	
	Jabulani Dlamini (UNIZULU)	
	Nondumiso Hadebe (UNIZULU)	
	Gonste Lebakeng (UNIZULU)	
	Khomotso Lekola (UNIZULU)	
	Ongezwa Mnethu (UNIZULU)	
	Jabulile Mzimela (UNIZULU)	
	Zwivhuyo Ndou (UNIZULU)	
	Seitebaleng Makgai (UP)	
	Phumudzo Tshiambara (UP)	
	Nyameka Mbonambi (WITS)	

	<p>Nomfundo Moroe (WITS)  Oliver Duna (WSU)  Vuyelwa Ncapayi (WSU)  Katelyn Johnson (UKZN)  Lebogang Molefe (UKZN)  December Mpanza (UKZN)  Thulani Mthombeni (UKZN)  Ntombifuthi Ngubane (UKZN)  Sibusiso Senzani (UKZN)  Tsetseleane Mdhluli (UL)  Kheto Nmutandani (UL)  Aluwani Ramalata (UL)  Neweman Wadesango (UL)  Themba Lukhele (UMP)  Sukoluhle Mazwane (UMP)  Nyiko Khoza (UNISA)  Gloria Ledwaba (UNISA)  Mpho Maboja (UNISA)  Nomampondo Magwa (UNISA)  Zolile Mguda (UNISA)  Raseputuka Saasa (UNISA)  Phumzile Sibisi (UNISA)  Matamela Matibe (UNIVEN)  Mmakoma Sebetso (UNIVEN)  Phillia Vukea (UNIVEN)  Seitebaleng Makgai (UP)  Lebogang Sekgwele (UP)  Phumudzo Tshiambara (UP)  Dale Ward (UP)  Anita Maurtin (UWC)  Elize Heuer (VUT)  Nyameka Mbonambi (WITS)  Nomfundo Moroe (WITS)  Oliver Duna (WSU)  Ferdie Gerber (WSU)  Vuyelwa Ncapayi (WSU)  Clever Ndebele (WSU)  Mawethu Ngcweleshe (WSU)</p>	
--	---	--

## **7. EXPERIENCES OF AN NGAP LECTURER/NESP SCHOLAR/ USDP STAFF MEMBER**

### **14:00-14:30**

The colloquium showcased the transformative journeys of academics who participated in the nGAP, NESP, and USDP programmes. Through their testimonies, Mr Faranani Gethe, Dr Siyabonga Dlamini, and Dr Makhaya Malema reflected on their experiences, highlighting the invaluable opportunities these initiatives provided in shaping their academic careers. Their stories illustrated the impact of mentorship, collaboration,

international exposure, and funding support in overcoming challenges and achieving significant milestones.

These testimonials featured the broader objectives of these programmes: fostering academic excellence, building capacity, and advancing transformation within South Africa's higher education system. By sharing their journeys, these academics offered powerful insights into the role of structured support systems in empowering individuals to succeed and, in turn, contribute to the development of the higher education sector.

## **Dr Siyabonga Dlamini, University of KwaZulu Natal – nGAP**

Dr Siyabonga Dlamini began his testimonial by expressing gratitude to the DHET for their support through the nGAP. Reflecting on his academic journey, he shared how his experiences have shaped his career and contributed to his growth as a researcher and academic. His journey started in September 2016, during a time when he was working with the local Department of Health on initiatives related to HIV/AIDS. Initially, his focus was on fulfilling one of the department's goals in this critical area. However, due to unforeseen challenges, he changed his research focus and became involved in a multinational collaborative project centred on lung cancer.

Dr Dlamini acknowledged that integrating one's personal research interests with the strategic goals of the university can often be challenging for some academics. However, he noted that in his case, administrative support was readily available, and he experienced minimal hurdles. He particularly commended the Human Resource Development division for their role in ensuring that nGAP funding was effectively allocated to support his research and professional development.

Through nGAP, he received funding for essential research equipment, international travel, and the opportunity to engage with world-class supervisors. This included registering for summer schools where he acquired advanced skills that enhanced his research capabilities. He described his experience with HRD as "amazing" and highlighted the significant impact of these opportunities on his academic career.

One of the reflections he shared was the importance of ensuring the longevity of programmes like nGAP. He emphasised that institutional commitment is crucial, particularly during periods of leadership changes, to ensure the continuity and success of these initiatives. Dr Dlamini urged institutions to safeguard the Programme's sustainability and to create policies that foster long-term academic development.

He also noted the flexibility provided by nGAP, which allowed participants to structure their own developmental plans. This freedom enabled him to set clear targets, align his goals with the programme's objectives, and pursue opportunities such as mobility programmes and international collaborations. He encouraged institutions to continue providing environments that support and retain talented staff, reducing the risk of staff being poached by other universities or organisations.

Dr Dlamini shared that his goals extended beyond personal achievements, as he was committed to publishing research with his students and ensuring that the benefits of his work filtered down to them. He acknowledged the setbacks he faced, including a year-long delay in his research due to ethical considerations, but emphasised that these challenges were part of the journey. Despite the obstacles, he highlighted how students have significantly benefited from the programme, furthering their own academic pursuits and aspirations.

On a personal note, he shared a touching story about how his academic achievements inspired his daughter, who expressed her desire to pursue a PhD after witnessing his dedication and success. This inspiration, he noted, extends beyond his family and into society, creating a ripple effect of positive influence. Dr Dlamini also reflected on the broader recognition of his work, citing an interview on Ukhozi FM about Zanele Mbokazi as an example of how his research on lung cancer has reached wider audiences. This acknowledgment, he said, was a testament to the importance of the work being done through programmes like nGAP.

In conclusion, Dr Dlamini emphasised the need for continued collaboration and communication between institutions, staff, and policymakers to ensure that such programmes remain impactful. He expressed his gratitude for the opportunities he received and reaffirmed his commitment to using his skills and experiences to inspire others and contribute to the transformation of higher education in South Africa.

## **Mr Faranani Gethe, University of Witwatersrand - NESP**

Mr Faranani Gethe began his testimonial by expressing gratitude to the event organisers and reflecting on his journey into academia. Raised in a rural area near Thohoyandou, Limpopo, he completed his undergraduate degree in Construction Management in 2013 and initially worked in industry. However, by 2018, he decided to return to academia to further his studies and pursue a new direction. This decision led him to enrol for a Postgraduate Diploma in Real Estate, where his passion for academia began to develop.

His journey into academia truly took shape when the opportunity to join the NESP arose. At the time, he was navigating how to transition into the academic space, drawn by its focus on knowledge creation, teaching, and community engagement. In 2020, one of his lecturers informed him about the NESP opportunity, and he applied. The response to his application came exactly one month after the devastating loss of his father to COVID-19. This period was one of the most difficult times in his life, but it also strengthened his resolve to honour his father's memory by completing what he had started. He began the programme in January 2022 with the determination to make his father proud.

Through the NESP, Mr Gethe was able to pursue opportunities that aligned with his aspirations. He attended academic conferences, presented research papers, and actively participated in regional scholarly discussions. These experiences allowed him to develop professionally while expanding his academic horizons.

He expressed heartfelt gratitude to his mentor, who provided invaluable guidance throughout his journey. He also acknowledged the support of his supervisors, which enabled him to supervise two students of his own. In addition, Mr Gethe was appointed as a sessional lecturer, a role he held for seven months before being offered a full-time lecturer position. In 2023, he successfully obtained his master's degree with distinction, a milestone that underscored his hard work and the transformative impact of the NESP.

Mr Gethe emphasised the importance of the DHET initiatives, such as the NESP, in fostering academic excellence and supporting public education. He noted that public education remains one of the greatest pathways for societal progress and urged for continued investment in and strengthening of the sector to benefit future generations.

In closing, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunities provided by the NESP, which not only helped him realise his academic aspirations but also equipped him to contribute meaningfully to teaching, research, and community engagement within the higher education landscape.

## **Dr Makhaya Malema, University of the Western Cape – USPD**

Dr Makhaya Malema expressed his heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the DHET and its implementing partners for hosting an event that was both informative and celebratory. Reflecting on his academic journey, Dr Malema began by acknowledging the challenges of pursuing a PhD, describing it as a rigorous and demanding process that is often a solitary endeavour. However, being part of the USDP programme provided him with an entirely different experience one of community, support, and shared purpose. He emphasised that the programme transformed what is commonly known as a lonely journey into a collaborative and enriching experience.

Dr Malema highlighted the significance of the programme's funding instruments, which played a critical role in his research journey, particularly during the data collection phase. This financial support alleviated many of the frustrations that researchers often face, enabling him to focus on the quality and impact of his work. The programme also opened doors to collaboration opportunities, which he described as both meaningful and career-defining. The international exposure he gained through the programme has had a profound impact on his career trajectory, offering him the chance to interact and engage with colleagues abroad. These interactions, he explained, fostered long-term collaborations, expanded his professional networks, and allowed him to join a community of practice that continues to influence his work.

Dr Malema shared key milestones from his journey in the programme. He joined the USDP in 2019, and by 2022, he had not only travelled internationally as part of the programme but also graduated with his PhD. He described 2022 as a landmark year in his academic career, as it also marked the beginning of several new opportunities. Shortly after completing his PhD, he applied for and secured a promotion, becoming a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Head of Department at his institution, a testament to the programme's influence on his professional growth.

He further elaborated on the partnerships and collaborations that the programme facilitated. Through the network he built, he connected with a colleague from the University of Zululand (whom he met through the USDP), and together they successfully secured international funding. Dr Malema proudly shared additional achievements, including receiving a strategic grant from the World Health Organization and being informed recently that he had been awarded an Erasmus+ grant. He is also currently in his second year of NRF funding, drawing attention to the continued momentum in his research career. These milestones, he emphasised, would not have been possible without the support and resources provided by the USDP.

In conclusion, Dr Malema expressed his deep gratitude to the DHET for its commitment to empowering academics and advancing the higher education system in South Africa. He also extended a special thank you to the USDP coordinators for their tireless efforts in ensuring that the process was as smooth and accessible as possible. Dr Malema's journey is a testament to the transformative potential of the USDP, and he looks forward to continuing to make meaningful contributions to academia, both locally and globally.

## **8. EXPERIENCES OF UCDP MENTORSHIP (NGAP, NESP, USDP)**

### **14:00-14:30**

The mentorship session, presented by Prof De Lange and Dr Prisca Simbanegavi, highlighted the importance of mentorship as a cornerstone of academic and professional development. They emphasised that mentorship should extend beyond academic achievements to include holistic support that nurtures personal growth and career advancement. The session highlighted the value of structured mentoring frameworks that promote collaboration and inclusivity, ensuring the sustainable development of emerging academics within the higher education sector.

### **Professor Naydene De Lange**

Professor Naydene De Lange began her address by greeting the audience warmly, expressing her delight, to have the opportunity to reflect on her journey as a mentor at Nelson Mandela University and to speak about the impactful experiences she had while mentoring young academics. She expressed gratitude to the chairperson and the academics present, acknowledging the successes that had been celebrated earlier in the day, and thanked everyone for the chance to share her reflections.

She began her address with a story that highlighted the power of perspective and support. The story was about a young man who, far from home in a new workplace, struggled with feelings of loneliness and uncertainty. Despite the distance and challenges, he found comfort in his mother's daily phone calls, which always ended with the question, "do you hear the birds?" At first, he dismissed the question, unsure of its significance, but later, it would come to represent a profound reminder of the support and care from those around him.

Prof De Lange then introduced herself, revealing her background as a Professor Emeritus from Nelson Mandela University, where she had started her academic journey as a student. Her professional career included serving as the HIV/AIDS Education Research Chair and as a research professor, focusing on participatory visual methodologies and their potential to foster social change in both academia and society. She expressed her gratitude for the privilege of being invited to serve as an institutional mentor at Nelson Mandela University, where she had the opportunity to contribute to the university's transformation by mentoring young academics. She highlighted the enthusiasm, passion, and potential of the academics she worked with, calling it a deeply rewarding experience.

Turning to the structure of the mentoring programme at the university, Prof De Lange explained that each nGAP participant was assigned both a departmental mentor, typically a head of department or colleague, and a manager to assist with administrative matters. As an institutional mentor, she was responsible for mentoring around 15 academics at a time, although the numbers fluctuated as people joined or left the programme. Her role encompassed mentoring in teaching, learning, research, and engagement, while also considering the well-being of the mentees as whole individuals. Her goal was not only to help mentees succeed academically but also to ensure they were happy, healthy, and balanced in their personal lives.

Prof De Lange noted the diversity of the nGAP cohort, which included participants from various professional backgrounds, disciplines, and age groups. This diversity often meant that mentees required induction into the university system, and she tailored her mentoring approach to meet their varied experiences and needs. Building trust with her mentees was a key aspect of her mentoring process. She made it a priority to listen attentively to both what was said and what remained unsaid, fostering an environment where mentees felt safe to share their challenges and struggles.

She observed that the young academics she mentored displayed remarkable drive and agency, which she found both inspiring and motivating. Drawing from her own experiences, both successes and failures, she shared her journey with her mentees, hoping they could learn from her story. Prof De Lange emphasised that academia was “extreme knowledge work” demanding, competitive, and often challenging. She acknowledged the difficulties women and young parents face in academia, advocating for better institutional support for these individuals. She shared a guiding principle from Professor Catherine Odora Hoppers: “You are a human before you are an academic,” which had shaped her own approach to mentoring.

In discussing her mentoring philosophy, Prof De Lange stressed the importance of care and humanity. She encouraged her mentees to adopt an ethic of care in their interactions with students, reminding them that students should always be seen as people first. She also offered practical advice on career planning, urging mentees to set realistic goals and milestones aligned with promotion criteria. She emphasised the value of building supportive networks with colleagues who could contribute to their professional growth and development.

Creating a sense of community among academics was another key focus of her work. Prof De Lange organised informal gatherings, such as coffee sessions and writing retreats, to provide opportunities for academics to connect, exchange ideas, and build camaraderie. These gatherings were also spaces to address academic challenges, such as doctoral identity and the use of visual methodologies in research. She often shared resources like *How to Be a Happy Academic* and *The 5am Club*, encouraging her mentees to adopt positive habits and strategies for success.

Prof De Lange acknowledged the heavy workloads that her mentees faced and how it often affected their ability to focus on research and other priorities. She shared examples of how she worked with faculty and department heads to negotiate reduced workloads for her mentees, enabling them to balance their academic responsibilities more effectively. Despite the challenges, she praised the resilience and determination of the nGAP academics, many of whom had achieved significant milestones through perseverance and the support they received.

In conclusion, Prof De Lange reflected on the immense joy and fulfilment she derived from mentoring. She likened the process to the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” highlighting the collective effort required to nurture the next generation of academics. She concluded her address by returning to the story of the young man who, after weeks of adjustment, opened his window one morning to hear birds singing brightly outside. This moment of solace, she explained, symbolised the value of perseverance and connection. She often shared this story with her mentees to remind them that, despite challenges, there is always hope and support available. “Prof, I hear the birds!” a testament to the power of mentorship and the positive impact it can have on an individual’s journey.

## Dr Prisca Simbanegavi

Dr Simbanegavi began her address by warmly thanking the organisers of the event and expressing her gratitude for the opportunity to speak about her journey in academia and mentorship. She shared that her academic career began at the University of Witwatersrand in 2012, where she started as a lecturer and later pursued her PhD, graduating in 2019. This dual experience of teaching and studying allowed her to understand the academic journey from both sides, helping her connect more deeply with her students.

She then reflected on her experience as a mentor. Initially, Dr Simbanegavi admitted that she found the role of mentoring somewhat daunting. She questioned why she had been selected to mentor others, but upon reflection, she realised that mentoring was something she had been doing instinctively throughout her career. She recounted how students would often approach her, asking questions like, “Doc, how can I be like you?” At first, she didn’t understand their curiosity, she saw herself as just another student, like them, with similar struggles and experiences. However, over time, she realised

that her journey had been different, and her students were seeking guidance from her experiences.

Dr Simbanegavi emphasised the importance of education in empowering individuals. She often told her students that education is what allows one to “fly” while others are still walking. It builds knowledge from the ground up, starting with fundamental principles and literature, ultimately allowing individuals to rise above and beyond their initial circumstances.

Turning to the topic of knowledge, Dr Simbanegavi spoke passionately about its evolving nature. She explained that academics understand that knowledge is not static, knowledge changes and grows over time, shaped by new contexts, ideas, and technologies. She used artificial intelligence (AI) as an example, noting that it was not a major part of earlier academic discussions but has now become a focal point in research and academic inquiry. This shift, she argued, challenges traditional notions of truth and knowledge, encouraging academics to stay flexible and open to new ideas.

Dr Simbanegavi shared her mentoring philosophy, describing how she maintains an open-door policy for her students. She encouraged them to approach her with any concerns, whether academic or personal, from Sunday to Saturday. She jokingly added that while she welcomed her students, they should avoid bringing “bad news” to her, as it helped maintain a positive, constructive environment. This approach made her students feel liberated and comfortable enough to reach out via email or WhatsApp to discuss their academic challenges.

She also shared a memorable moment when a student approached her, eager to teach her about philosophy. The student broke the subject into epistemology, ontology, and axiology, and Dr Prisca embraced the opportunity for reciprocal learning. She acknowledged that mentoring is not just about guiding students but also learning from them, appreciating their fresh perspectives and enthusiasm.

Another key aspect of Dr Simbanegavi’s mentoring was teaching her students how to identify and articulate the real problems they aim to address through research. She urged her students to dig deeper than surface-level observations and to back their findings with evidence. Dr Simbanegavi guided them on how to think critically about societal issues such as hunger and poverty, helping them understand how to write academically and make strong, substantiated arguments.

Dr Simbanegavi reflected on the evolution of her role from a supervisor to a mentor. Initially, she viewed her role as one of supervision, but over time she recognised that it was more about guiding her students through the academic value chain from undergraduate studies to postgraduate research. Her goal was always to empower her students to “fly” and reach their full potential. However, she acknowledged that mentorship came with its challenges. Balancing the role of guide and confidant required careful navigation of professional boundaries. She shared that the lack of mentorship she experienced early in her career had taught her resilience and self-reliance, which she now imparted to her mentees.

Seeing her mentees succeed brought Dr Simbanegavi immense joy and fulfilment. She proudly recounted how many of her mentees earned distinctions and achieved significant success in their academic journeys. Yet, she also noted the pressure that came with this success, as other students aspired to reach similar milestones. To prepare them, she emphasised the importance of preparation, advising her mentees to practice their presentations in advance to ensure they exuded professionalism and confidence.

Dr Simbanegavi also spoke about the complexities of being seen as a transformation agent within academia. She shared an anecdote about a mentee who asked her how she would feel if they became the new head of school. She responded candidly, expressing that at this stage of her life, she was more concerned with her health and well-being. However, she would feel immense pride seeing her mentee take on such a leadership role. The mentee reassured her, saying, "I would be an extension of you, continuing the journey we began together," a sentiment that deeply resonated with Dr Simbanegavi.

In her address, Dr Simbanegavi stressed the importance of humility, critical thinking, and an awareness of the broader impact one has as an academic. She shared a story of a mentee who returned from an international conference transformed by exposure to diverse perspectives. This experience broadened their academic horizons and deepened their understanding of global scholarship. Dr Simbanegavi also reflected on her African identity and how it shaped her academic journey. Despite studying abroad, she never allowed her international education to overshadow her African roots. Instead, she focused on creating knowledge that was relevant to African contexts, ensuring her work benefited the communities she served.

Finally, Dr Simbanegavi emphasised the importance of creativity and problem-solving in research. She encouraged her students to think innovatively when addressing real-world challenges like housing and poverty. She reminded them that even if their research seemed unique or groundbreaking, it could contribute to solving significant societal problems and inspire change.

Dr Simbanegavi concluded her address by expressing immense pride in nurturing thinkers, not followers. She encouraged her students to take initiative, communicate their ideas confidently, and actively contribute to both the academic and societal landscape. Her reflections underscored her dedication to mentoring, her passion for education, and her unwavering commitment to fostering a transformative academic environment.

## **9. CRAFTING A CAREER AS AN ACADEMIC AFTER YOUR M/PHD**

**15:00-15:30**

**PROFESSOR KERTI MENON, UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG**

Professor Kerti Menon delivered an inspiring and insightful address to emerging academics, offering both wisdom from her extensive experience and practical advice for navigating a successful career in academia. She began her speech by acknowledging the addictive nature of higher education, describing it as a field that captures its participants for life. Drawing from her 40 years of experience in the sector, she humorously suggested that those in the audience were either “addicts or masochists,” given the demanding and often overwhelming nature of academic work. Despite its challenges, Prof Menon emphasised that academia is a deeply rewarding and fulfilling journey, one that captivates its participants like few other professions can.

She went on to describe universities as environments that are simultaneously mystical, magical, and sometimes perplexing even to those who have spent decades working within their corridors. This complexity, she noted, makes it all the more important for academics to understand their environment and the expectations placed on them.

Prof Menon stressed the necessity for emerging academics to familiarize themselves with their university’s specific policies and promotion criteria. She pointed out that these policies can vary widely across South Africa’s 26 universities, with some institutions allowing faculty members to apply for promotions annually, while others limit applications to every two years. Understanding these nuances, she emphasised, is crucial for academic success. Beyond university-specific guidelines, she also highlighted the importance of engaging with the broader higher education sector, including funding bodies like the Department of Science and Innovation, the National Research Foundation (NRF), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). These entities play a crucial role in shaping the academic landscape and providing the necessary resources to support academic work.

Prof Menon then offered strategic advice for academics, encouraging them to think about their long-term goals and to approach their academic careers with a clear sense of self-awareness. One useful exercise, she suggested, is conducting a personal SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis to help identify areas for improvement and to capitalize on their strengths. She also encouraged emerging scholars to find a unique research question or niche that could set them apart in their field. While publishing in academic journals remains important, she cautioned that a single publication would provide only fleeting recognition. Instead, she urged academics to think more broadly about the impact of their research and how it could contribute to global knowledge and address societal challenges.

A key point Prof Menon made was the importance of self-advocacy. She advised the audience to build an online presence through platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and LinkedIn. These platforms not only make research more visible but also foster connections with other academics and potential collaborators. She emphasised the necessity of networking, attending conferences, and engaging with peers, as these connections can be invaluable for professional growth.

Prof Menon also addressed the multifaceted nature of academic work, noting that the balance between teaching, research, and administrative duties can be particularly challenging. She encouraged her audience to reflect critically on their pedagogical approaches and to view teaching as an opportunity to co-construct knowledge with students, thereby contributing to their development. She reminded the emerging scholars that academic work extends beyond the classroom and must have a broader societal impact. By engaging in research that addresses real-world problems, academics can contribute meaningfully to the development of solutions for pressing societal issues.

As academics advance in their careers, they will inevitably take on leadership and administrative roles. While these tasks may seem burdensome at times, Professor Menon suggested that they should be viewed as opportunities to shape the future of higher education. Even seemingly mundane tasks, like grading, should be approached with dedication, as they are integral to the educational process.

One important concept Prof Menon shared was the idea of becoming a “T-shaped academic.” This concept emphasizes the balance between breadth and depth in one’s discipline, having a broad understanding of multiple areas of knowledge while also developing deep expertise in a specific niche. She argued that this balance is essential for making meaningful contributions to academia and engaging in interdisciplinary work.

Prof Menon encouraged the audience to take full advantage of the resources available at their universities, such as academic development units and workshops. These resources can help refine skills and build professional identities. She also stressed the importance of lifelong learning, noting that academia is an ongoing journey that requires continuous self-improvement and adaptation.

In addition to academic responsibilities, Prof Menon highlighted the importance of external leadership and community engagement. She encouraged participants to become involved in professional associations, conferences, and other initiatives within their fields. Universities, she noted, are no longer isolated “ivory towers” but are integral parts of society. As such, academics have a responsibility to engage with societal challenges and contribute to the greater good. By fostering relationships with external networks and communities, academics can amplify the impact of their work and build lasting connections that extend beyond the walls of their institutions.

In her concluding remarks, Prof Menon emphasised the lifelong nature of an academic career. Once individuals enter academia, she observed, they rarely leave—often remaining deeply connected to the field even after retirement. She encouraged the emerging academics in the audience to embrace their journey with enthusiasm and determination. While the road ahead may be challenging, it is also deeply rewarding. She urged them to enjoy the process, support one another, and continue building their networks and skills throughout their careers.

## Future of the nGAP-Closure

Ms Cakwe began her address by expressing her satisfaction with the day's proceedings, highlighting how well the event had unfolded. She extended her appreciation to the communications team for their efforts in sharing timely updates about the event across various social media platforms. She also thanked all the attendees for their active participation, acknowledging the excellent engagement throughout the programme.

Turning to the future of the programme, Ms Cakwe emphasised the significant impact it had already made in building the capacity of emerging academics. She stressed that the transformation of higher education cannot be achieved through appointments alone. True change, she explained, requires a concerted effort to work within universities and extend beyond institutional walls. Ms Cakwe urged the attendees to reflect on their role in shaping the future of academia, noting that their journey through the programme had not been easy, but they had persevered with determination and success. The department, she added, was immensely proud of their achievements and looked forward to seeing the impact of their work in both their universities and the broader higher education system.

She expressed her excitement about the results of the programme, noting that its success was visible not only at the institutional level but also internationally. This, she said, was a testament to the hard work and commitment of the participants. Ms Cakwe reaffirmed that the department's support would continue, given the positive outcomes already achieved and the ongoing potential for further impact.

Ms Cakwe then shared her vision for the future of the programme. She clarified that its ultimate goal was not just to focus on race, gender, or age, although these issues were indeed important, but rather to drive a broader transformation of higher education. She emphasised that the Programme's true value lies in enhancing the quality of research and its application to real-world challenges. Research outcomes, she explained, should not merely sit in libraries or be published in journals; they should lead to practical changes that contribute to societal progress. She encouraged the attendees to take the knowledge and findings from their research and use them to challenge the status quo and drive meaningful, positive change.

A critical element of transformation, Ms Cakwe noted, is mentorship in academia. While mentorship cannot be formally taught, she stressed, it is an intrinsic quality that the attendees should embody in their academic careers. She encouraged them to take on mentoring roles and support future generations of academics who will follow in their footsteps. Transforming higher education is not just about individual success but also about contributing to a more dynamic, high-quality academic environment. She urged the group to take this responsibility seriously as they moved forward in their careers.

In her closing remarks, Ms Cakwe reassured the attendees that, despite any potential changes in government, the programme's future was secure. The department, she affirmed, would continue to support their efforts and ensure that the programme's

success would not only be maintained but expanded. She expressed her confidence that the transformative work already underway would continue to flourish, and that together, they would drive ongoing transformation in higher education.

Ms Cakwe concluded her speech by wishing everyone a pleasant evening at the upcoming dinner, where they would have the chance to relax and celebrate their achievements. She thanked everyone for their invaluable contributions to the programme's success. Looking ahead to the following day, she expressed her anticipation for the presentations and discussions that would unfold, confident that they would continue to inspire and advance the goals of the Programme.

## DAY 2 PANEL DISCUSSION & PLENARY

Day 2 of the colloquium centred on a thought-provoking panel discussion that explored the theme of transforming post-school education and training through capacity development. The discussion brought together insightful perspectives from academics and thought leaders, delving into the challenges and opportunities in fostering meaningful transformation within the higher education system.

In addition to the panel discussion, the day provided an engaging platform for scholars and lecturers to showcase their research and academic work. Presentations were held in two break-away rooms, where participants shared their studies and papers, sparking stimulating conversations and fostering collaboration among attendees.

### 1. OFFICIAL OPENING – KEYNOTE

**09:00–09:30**

#### **MR PHILLIP TSHABALALA, CHIEF DIRECTOR FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT (DHET)**

Mr Phillip Tshabalala began his address by acknowledging the importance of continuing the dialogue on the strategies and priorities of the Government of National Unity, with a focus on the 7th administration's commitment to transformation in higher education. He noted that academic careers have undergone significant changes in the past 20 years, driven both by global trends in academia and local pressures specific to South Africa. Mr Tshabalala outlined several factors that have had an impact on academic work today:

- Publishing pressure on academics,
- The corporatisation of universities, which has become more pronounced,
- Increased administrative duties for academic staff,
- Resource constraints and the pressure to secure external funding,
- The growth of technology used to support academic work,
- The pressure of teaching in a context where low throughput rates are a persistent reality.

He emphasised that the low throughput rates within South African universities are a critical issue that requires more attention and a broader discussion on how to address them in the sector.

Mr Tshabalala continued by highlighting the rapid expansion of the university sector in terms of enrolments. While enrolments have grown significantly, the number of academic staff has not kept pace. This has resulted in increasing teaching loads and high student-to-staff ratios. He emphasised that addressing the renewal and expansion of the academic profession is essential for the long-term sustainability of high-quality public higher education in South Africa.

In response to these challenges, the DHET introduced the UCDP, which aims to address these gaps and foster sustainable academic growth. However, he stressed that the programme requires time, patience, and investment to achieve its full potential. He underscored the importance of partnerships among universities to enrich the benefits that these initiatives offer.

Mr Tshabalala explained that transformation in higher education is not just about race, gender, and age but also about the quality of education itself. He pointed to the masters and doctoral candidates being produced as a key part of the transformation process. He outlined the graduate attributes that universities should aim to instil in both undergraduate and postgraduate students, including:

- Deep discipline knowledge and intellectual depth, particularly in the age of artificial intelligence,
- Creative and critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which should be nurtured from basic education through to university level,
- Teamwork and communication skills, as well as professionalism and leadership readiness,
- Intercultural and ethical competency, which is particularly relevant in the current South African context,
- Digital capabilities, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence,
- An understanding of uBuntu, the philosophy of humanity and interconnectedness, which emphasizes that “we are because of others.”

He referenced the National Development Plan, which outlines three main functions of universities:

- To educate and provide high-level skills for the labour market,
- To be the dominant producers of new knowledge and apply existing knowledge in innovative ways,
- To provide opportunities for social community building, while strengthening social justice and democracy to overcome the inequalities of the apartheid past.

Looking ahead, Mr Tshabalala stated that the work of entrenching the transformation project in the higher education system will continue, with clear targets set for the coming years. While it is difficult to predict exactly when full redress will be achieved, the department is committed to monitoring the progress made through these programmes, with the hope that time will tell the full impact of these efforts.

He extended a warm welcome to the esteemed lecturers being celebrated during the colloquium, encouraging them to empower themselves and their students to view the world through an ethical lens. Mr Tshabalala highlighted the role of academics as agents of change, challenging the status quo in both higher education and society. He acknowledged South Africa's rich talent in academia and expressed confidence in the ability of local academics to make a significant difference, despite the challenges.

Mr Tshabalala also discussed the UCDP's emphasis on institutional support from the start. The programme's success lies in the trust placed by DHET in universities to foster academic development that is fit for purpose. He praised the panel of distinguished speakers who would address the issues of transformation through capacity development, recognising their commitment to public service and passion for uplifting the country.

Finally, Mr Tshabalala took a moment to appreciate the panel members for their contributions and achievements, acknowledging that their success was the result of sustained investment from their respective universities. He highlighted the importance of mentorship, not only within the UCDP programme but also in extending this support to the students they teach. Mentorship, he said, plays a crucial role in shaping the future of higher education in South Africa.

## **2. PANEL DISCUSSION**

### **09:30-11:00**

The panel discussion was moderated by Prof Lethiwe Nzama-Sithole is an Associate Professor and Deputy Head in the Department of Commercial Accounting at the University of Johannesburg

The panel consisted of the following panellists:

- Mr Imraan Patel, Deputy Director-General: Research Development and Support, Department of Science and Technology
- Prof Thabo Msibi, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning & Professor of Curriculum Studies in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal
- Dr Andrew Kaniki, former Executive Director: Knowledge Advancement and Support (KAS), National Research Foundation (NRF), current Temporary Manager for Special Projects Division at the University of Johannesburg
- Prof Somadoda Fikeni, a visiting professor at the Nelson Mandela University and the chairperson of the Public Service Commission of South Africa

## Thoughts on transforming the post-school education and training through capacity development

The discussion began with the first question, which invited the panellists to share their thoughts on transforming post-school education and training through capacity development:

### ***Prof Somadoda Fikeni:***

Professor Fikeni began the discussion by emphasising that the transformation of higher education should not solely focus on issues like race and gender, which have traditionally been the main areas of attention. While demographic factors are important, he argued that addressing the broader societal challenges should be the focus. Universities, he stated, need to equip individuals with the necessary skills to face the challenges of today and the future.

A key part of this transformation is self-mastery. He pointed out that individuals already within the system must transform themselves to become agents of change. For this to happen, people must be willing to unlearn outdated knowledge and relearn the skills and perspectives needed for transformation. He stressed that we often expect universities to act as catalysts for societal change without reflecting on the need for self-introspection within the academic system itself. To truly transform the world, he argued, we need to start by transforming ourselves as individuals and within our institutions.

### ***Prof Thabo Msibi:***

Professor Msibi followed up by highlighting the pivotal role of self-transformation within higher education. He reflected on the journey of early academics, particularly how the attainment of a PhD is often seen as a final achievement. He pointed out that the idea of “becoming” should be central to transformation. Drawing on the philosophy of Maxine Greene, he explained that becoming is an ongoing, lifelong process, one that cannot be fully achieved but is constantly evolving.

He also touched on the significant role that representation plays in academic spaces. As a young academic who never envisioned reaching the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor at his age, he pointed out that their presence in these spaces challenges the legacy of exclusion, particularly in universities that have historically been shaped by colonial structures. Transformation, he emphasised, is not only about self-change but also about changing the knowledge project. This project, he argued, often prioritises Western knowledge systems while marginalizing other epistemologies, especially in the African context.

Prof Msibi encouraged the audience to think critically about their work and its potential contribution to society. He asked, “How are we contributing to the betterment of society through our research, and how can we position ourselves as key contributors to global knowledge?”

***Dr Andrew Kaniki:***

Dr Kaniki further explored the concept of transformation, emphasising that it is a full cycle involving knowledge production. He highlighted that transformation is not just about demographics but about who produces knowledge and how it is produced. This conversation is particularly important in both the natural sciences and social sciences, where the question of who owns knowledge and who gets to create it has become a critical issue.

He shared a recent experience from the University of Johannesburg, where he participated in a class with Professor Ndzendze, who emphasised that knowledge is political. Dr Kaniki reinforced that for transformation to be meaningful, it must involve a shift in the way knowledge is produced and who gets to produce it.

He expressed excitement over the growing numbers of PhD students, noting that the NRF had identified a need for a substantial increase in the number of PhDs by 2030. However, he also pointed out the importance of supporting established researchers, as neglecting them creates gaps in the academic system. Transformation, he argued, requires a balance between nurturing young researchers and supporting those already established in the field.

Dr Kaniki concluded by praising the collaborative efforts between universities, government, and international partners like the British Council, emphasising that transformation is a shared responsibility across various sectors, not just one entity. This holistic approach is necessary to ensure long-term success in the transformation of post-school education.

***Mr Imraan Patel:***

Mr Patel focused on the reimagining of the post-school education and training system, acknowledging the challenges and blockages that exist within traditional institutions. He emphasised that higher education institutions are often the last to change, despite the rapid developments in society, particularly with the fourth industrial revolution. He argued that the post-school education system needs to evolve to better serve the needs of the population and align with the changing demands of the world.

He also raised the point that the traditional focus on demographic transformation should be expanded to include a more diverse academic stream, balancing the number of students pursuing academic careers with those entering technical and vocational education. This, he said, is part of reimagining how post-school education can better meet the country's needs.

Mr Patel reflected on his recent exposure to international educational initiatives, particularly the Atlantic Indian Ocean Research Alliance (AIORA), which focuses on diversity, inclusion, and equity. He noted that the way Western education tends to control knowledge production needs to be reconsidered. He suggested that nature and cultural diversity have much to offer in transforming educational paradigms, and the system needs to be re-envisioned in a way that values these contributions.

He also highlighted the importance of capacity development and suggested three additional capabilities that must be fostered:

- Futures orientation: developing the ability to anticipate future needs and challenges.
- Systems thinking recognising that institutions are part of larger systems and must be understood in this context.
- Design thinking: creating solutions with the end goal in mind, especially when addressing complex social issues.

He concluded by asserting that transformation in higher education must not only address race and gender but also the intersectionality of these factors with knowledge production and capacity building. Only then can we truly create an educational system that is equitable, innovative, and capable of addressing the needs of society.

## How do we address the systemic exclusion that existed for decades without addressing race?

### ***Mr Imraan Patel:***

Mr Patel opened the discussion on systemic exclusion by referencing systems thinking, which emphasizes the complexity and adaptability of systems. He explained that, in the context of higher education, systemic issues can persist and create unintended consequences if not properly addressed. For this reason, he argued that it is crucial to strengthen evidence-based management of the system.

He emphasised the need to move beyond traditional monitoring and evaluation methods and take swift action to implement the correct measures before problematic practices become entrenched in the system. According to Mr Patel, the key to addressing exclusion lies in rethinking how we manage systemic structures and ensuring that they evolve in ways that are sustainable and inclusive.

### ***Prof Somadoda Fikeni:***

Prof Fikeni provided a historical perspective on the issue of exclusion, emphasising that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid continues to shape the dynamics of exclusion in South African universities. However, he pointed out that the forms of exclusion have evolved and vary from institution to institution. He highlighted that while the discourse on demographic inclusion, particularly regarding race, dominates the transformation conversation, some historically Black universities may not face the same challenges. Instead, their focus should be on reforming the curriculum to better serve the needs of their students.

Prof Fikeni also raised the issue of institutional exclusions that have emerged in recent years. For example, he noted that in some universities, staff from other African countries have taken over faculties, leading to the exclusion of South African academics. In these cases, South African staff report delays in receiving responses to

their queries, while colleagues from other countries are given immediate attention. This creates a sense of marginalization within the institutions.

Additionally, Prof Fikeni addressed the shift from technical and cognitive training to normative, value-based education, particularly in relation to issues such as ethics and corruption. He raised concerns about how many graduates, despite going through rigorous academic programmes, still end up involved in unethical practices. He suggested that difficult questions should be asked regarding the broader educational context, such as the closure of vocational colleges (e.g., teacher, agricultural, and nursing colleges) and the assumption that universities would automatically take on the training roles of these institutions.

Prof Fikeni questioned the effectiveness of the merger of universities into comprehensive institutions, asking whether it has truly advanced transformation or whether traditional universities have simply absorbed the responsibilities of other colleges, overburdening themselves in the process. Ultimately, he urged the panel to reflect on the priorities of the country and whether the current transformation efforts truly address these needs.

***Prof Thabo Msibi:***

Prof Msibi echoed the importance of the DHET's investments in transforming the higher education system. He acknowledged the uneven treatment of transformation across institutions, noting that while some universities make deliberate efforts to mainstream transformation and monitor the experiences of emerging academics, others merely provide funding without ensuring that transformation goals are actually met.

He argued that there needs to be a more deliberate effort to address the transformation question. This includes mainstreaming transformation practices and actively seeking out tangible ways to improve the experience of those who are entering academic spaces, particularly those who have historically been excluded. Prof Msibi emphasised that transformation should not be treated as an administrative task but as an ongoing and active process that requires continuous reflection and intentional effort from institutions and individuals alike.

## Questions and Discussions from the floor

### Question 1:

**When we talk about transformation in the universities, are we being deliberate enough in ensuring that graduates are relevant to the demands of society?**

- Prof Msibi highlighted that as the world changes, higher education must also evolve in terms of teaching modalities and practices. He emphasised the importance of bringing agility into the system to adapt to a rapidly changing world. Universities must reconsider their approaches to better prepare graduates for the future.
- Dr Prof Kaniki challenged the participants to view the transformation agenda of higher education as a field of study. He proposed tracking the post-PhD journey of UCDP-funded participants as a collaborative project across universities. This would provide insights into how transformation is manifesting in the careers of emerging scholars and help assess the long-term impact of these programmes.

### Question 2:

**What is being done to address systemic exclusion in the university system, particularly the exclusion of Black graduates entering higher education? What is the role of the DHET and current transformational programmes in addressing these issues?**

- Mr Patel responded by discussing systems thinking, noting that systems have complex dynamics and, if not disrupted, they lead to unintended consequences. He emphasised the need to strengthen evidence-based management to address these systemic issues quickly before they become entrenched. Transformation requires moving beyond monitoring and evaluation to more effective and immediate actions.
- Prof Fikeni added a historical perspective, noting that colonialism and apartheid created systemic exclusions that are still felt today. However, exclusion is not uniform across institutions. For example, some universities are increasingly staffed by non-South African academics, which sometimes marginalizes South African scholars. He also pointed out the need to rethink curricula and include more normative value-based education to address ethical issues and

corruption scandals among graduates. Prof Fikeni raised concerns about the closure of vocational colleges and the assumption that universities should absorb their functions, questioning whether mergers and comprehensive universities have truly advanced transformation.

- Prof Msibi emphasised that the investment from DHET in transformation is being implemented in different ways across institutions. While some universities actively work to mainstream transformation and monitor the experiences of emerging academics, others only ensure accountability for spending. He called for a more deliberate and systematic effort to track and improve transformation efforts, ensuring that the experience of emerging academics is more tangible and impactful.

### **Question 3:**

**How do we address the systemic exclusion that has persisted for decades, without solely focusing on race, but instead addressing broader issues within the education system?**

- Mr Patel suggested that learning by doing is key to overcoming systemic exclusion. He argued that innovative practices are needed to disrupt outdated systems. He referred to the concept of niches within systems, where alternative practices are emerging in different areas, and how these can challenge and disrupt entrenched systems. He emphasised that the system's unintended consequences must be addressed by nurturing these emerging niches, which could lead to transformative changes.
- Prof Msibi shared the need to restructure the way we teach and learn. As products of our own teachers, academics often replicate the teaching methods they experienced. He stressed that higher education needs a shift toward the science of learning and that students today have access to 24/7 knowledge through digital means like AI and smartphones. The challenge is how to teach students who can access information instantly and how to shift away from one-dimensional disciplinary knowledge toward a more agile learning system.
- Prof Fikeni emphasised the importance of preparing students for self-sufficiency. Rather than training students solely for the job market, he argued, universities should help students develop the creativity and adaptability they need to thrive, regardless of whether they secure the jobs they initially aspire to. He also stressed the importance of offering basic skills like computer literacy, social media literacy, and financial literacy to all students, irrespective of their field of study. Moreover, he suggested a multidisciplinary approach, where students in different fields—such as law, commerce, and humanities—are encouraged to learn from each other, creating more holistic, adaptable graduates.

#### Question 4:

**As we face high graduate unemployment, how do we design curricula that produce adaptive graduates? What attributes should we embed in our curriculum to prepare students for the challenges of the future?**

- Mr Patel suggested that pragmatic learning, or learning by doing, is essential for producing graduates who can adapt to the challenges of the real world. He further explained that transformative innovation policies need to be based on multi-level perspective theories, where alternative, innovative practices (niches) can disrupt outdated systems. These practices would help create a more dynamic, adaptable workforce and provide more practical, hands-on education.
- Prof Msibi emphasised that the mindset shift is crucial. He noted that, as educators, we often teach the way we were taught, which limits the development of adaptive thinking in students. To create adaptive graduates, he argued, there needs to be a shift towards understanding the science of learning and adapting to how students today process information. Education must move beyond traditional, fact-based learning to incorporate skills like critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, which are essential for students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The Facilitator, Prof Nzama-Sithole noted the following key points:

- Transformation must extend beyond race, gender, and age, addressing systemic enablers such as curriculum reform, institutional structures, and historical inequalities. Universities must also tackle emerging exclusions, ensuring inclusive and holistic development across the sector.
- Academics must engage in self-transformation to become agents of change, rethinking teaching practices and adopting innovative, interdisciplinary approaches. This agility is crucial to preparing graduates for an ever-changing world.
- Capacity development programmes are vital for addressing systemic gaps in higher education, but their success depends on consistent implementation. Collaboration among universities, government departments, and international partners is essential to achieve sustainable transformation.
- Higher education must prioritise inclusive knowledge production by integrating African perspectives and moving beyond Western-dominated frameworks. Normative, value-based education is critical for embedding ethics and addressing societal challenges like corruption and inequality.

- Academic workloads must be balanced to allow meaningful engagement in teaching, research, and administration. Research should focus on real-world impact, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship to address societal challenges and create sustainable solutions.
- Curricula should develop graduates who are adaptable, creative, and capable of driving innovation. Embedding critical thinking, design thinking, digital literacy, and financial literacy across disciplines is essential for producing job creators, not just job seekers.
- Breaking entrenched barriers in higher education requires systems thinking and evidence-based approaches. Programmes must track and evaluate participants' experiences to address institutional discrepancies and improve outcomes.
- Mentorship plays a vital role in supporting transformation by guiding academics and students toward success. Academics are encouraged to foster inclusive environments that prioritize growth, collaboration, and mutual support.

## Break-away plenary 11:20 – 13:15

Two concurrent break-away plenaries were held during this session, offering participants the opportunity to present their research. These presentations showcased the breadth of work undertaken by the scholars, highlighting innovative approaches and contributions to knowledge within their respective fields. The plenaries served as a platform for engagement, collaboration, and feedback, fostering a vibrant exchange of ideas among attendees.

*SEE ANNEXURE A*

### 3. CLOSURE DR HARRIE ESTERHUYSE 13:15 – 14:00

Dr Esterhuyse expressed gratitude to the DHET for their unwavering support, both financially and through their active engagement in ensuring the success of the programme. He extended his thanks to the managers, coordinators, and mentors of the NESP, nGAP, and USDP programmes, acknowledging their invaluable assistance. Finally, he offered heartfelt appreciation to the participants of the programmes, emphasising that they represent the true outcomes and achievements of these transformative initiatives.

# ANNEXURE A

BREAK-AWAY PLENARY – A		
Presenter	Discipline	Presented Research Paper
1. Dr. Letebele Mphahlele University of Johannesburg	Accounting	<p><b>Title: A Framework for developing critical thinking skills for accounting students</b></p> <p>This was qualitative study examines the significance of critical thinking skills in the field of accounting, emphasising their relevance as a key soft skill for accounting graduates. It identifies a core challenge: the misalignment among three key stakeholder groups, accounting employers, professional bodies, and academics in defining critical thinking skills. This misalignment hinders the effective fostering of such skills in accounting education. The research aimed to address three questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do stakeholders define and describe critical thinking skills in accounting?</li> <li>• What teaching strategies are effective for developing these skills in accounting students?</li> <li>• What tools or methods are suitable for assessing and evaluating critical thinking skills?</li> </ul> <p>Key findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders use different terminologies but associate critical thinking skills with three main attributes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evaluating information.</li> <li>○ Applying information to solve problems.</li> <li>○ Adopting attitudes that support ongoing critical thinking.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>There is a lack of recognised effective teaching strategies and assessment tools for critical thinking in accounting education.</p> <p>To address these issues, the study developed a framework for fostering critical thinking skills, anchored in a unified definition of critical thinking, and aimed to align the perspectives of all three stakeholder groups. The framework highlights the importance of integrated teaching strategies and robust assessment methods tailored to accounting programmes.</p>
2. Dr. Sukoluhle Mazwane University of Mpumalanga	Agricultural Economics	<p><b>Title: Value Chain Digitalisation and Adoption Intention by Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) Farmers in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa</b></p> <p>This study explored the behavioural factors influencing farmers' intentions to adopt digital technologies in agricultural value chains, focusing on Eastern Cape Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) farms in South Africa. The research highlights the role of digital technologies in enhancing connectivity, resilience, and sustainability within agricultural systems. A random sample of 100 PLAS farms was surveyed using semi-structured questionnaires.</p> <p>The data was analysed using R and STATA, applying the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance expectancy (perceived benefits) and effort expectancy (ease of use) significantly influence farmers' intentions to adopt value chain digital technologies.</li> <li>• Male farmers exhibited higher expectations for both performance and effort, indicating gender differences in adoption attitudes.</li> <li>• Demonstrating the performance benefits and conducting training sessions on using these technologies are crucial to encourage broader adoption.</li> </ul> <p>The study enriches the literature on the adoption of digital technologies in agricultural value chains and underscores the need for targeted training and demonstrations to address behavioural barriers among farmers.</p>
3. Dr. Dannis Mashabela University of Johannesburg	Biochemistry	<p><b>Title: Rhizosphere Tripartite Interactions and PGPR-Mediated Metabolic Reprogramming towards ISR and Plant Priming: A Metabolomics Review</b></p> <p>This study reviewed the role of plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria (PGPR) in plant growth and defence against biotic and abiotic stresses, focusing on rhizosphere chemical communications and tripartite interactions between plants, pathogenic microbes, and beneficial microbes. The objective of the study was to explore rhizosphere communication systems, tripartite interaction mechanisms, and the biochemical implications for plant metabolomes, with a focus on how PGPR induce systemic resistance (ISR) and priming at molecular and metabolic levels. Key insights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant-Microbe Interactions: PGPR contribute to plant growth and defence through chemical communication in the rhizosphere, yet comprehensive knowledge of these interactions remains limited.</li> <li>• Tripartite interactions: The interactions among plants, pathogenic microbes, and PGPR influence plant metabolome reprogramming, but the detailed mechanisms are not fully understood.</li> <li>• Metabolomics Applications: Advances in metabolomics have enabled detailed analysis of plant metabolomes and metabolic reprogramming due to tripartite interactions, offering insights into ISR and priming.</li> </ul> <p>The review highlighted the need for further investigation into rhizosphere communications and PGPR effects at the molecular and metabolic levels, emphasising the utility of metabolomics in decoding these complex interactions.</p> <p>This work synthesises current knowledge and identifies research gaps in understanding PGPR's role in plant growth and defence, proposing metabolomics as a key tool for advancing this field.</p>
4. Dr. Thabile Zondi University of KwaZulu Natal	Geography Education	<p><b>Title: An Inquiry-based Learning framework for teaching Geographic Information Systems in a rural learning ecology. Improving the teaching of Geographic Information Systems in schools with no computers</b></p> <p>This study investigated the use of an inquiry-based learning framework for teaching Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in a rural learning ecology, aiming to address challenges in GIS education. The research was grounded in the transformative paradigm and utilised Participatory Action Research (PAR) to involve 17 stakeholders in a collaborative exploration of teaching and learning GIS. Key findings indicated barriers to GIS education included:</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of formal GIS training for educators.</li> <li>• Reliance on traditional, non-interactive teaching approaches.</li> <li>• Inadequate resources for GIS instruction.</li> <li>• Negative teacher attitudes toward GIS.</li> </ul> <p>To address the training gap, workshops were conducted focusing on GIS content knowledge and pedagogy, integrating the Inquiry-based learning framework. These workshops:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved teacher attitudes toward GIS.</li> <li>• Enhanced participants' capacity to adopt innovative teaching strategies.</li> </ul> <p>The study emphasised the role of collaborative action and communicative engagement among stakeholders in overcoming educational challenges. The research highlights the effectiveness of Inquiry-based learning in fostering collaboration and improving GIS teaching practices in rural contexts. It recommends adopting this framework to enhance GIS education and address systemic barriers in resource-constrained settings.</p>
<p>5. Dr Nolwazi Qumbisa Central University of Technology</p>	<p>Built Environment</p>	<p>Title: <i>Case-based research on the FEDUP model for self-help housing</i></p> <p>This dissertation investigated the relationship between self-help housing and the promotion of community identity in neighbourhoods where residents construct their own homes. Self-help housing relies on individuals' sweat equity, allowing households to plan and build their houses, embedding personal elements into the design and fostering a sense of identification with the local area. Primary data was collected via surveys to provide a local perspective. Secondary data contextualised the findings internationally. The study was guided by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel &amp; Turner, 1979) and Self-Help Housing Theory (Turner, 1976). Key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a clear link between self-help housing and community identity.</li> <li>• Construction activities encourage personal input, enabling residents to create environments that reflect their individual and collective identities.</li> <li>• This process has the potential to enhance social cohesion and community unity, addressing the current lack of these elements in many South African communities.</li> </ul> <p>The research expanded on the social dynamics of self-build housing in South Africa, providing insights for stakeholders seeking to improve community identity and cohesion. It highlights self-help housing as a possible solution for fostering stronger, more unified neighbourhoods.</p>
<p>6. Dr Chinaka &amp; Dr Msweli University of Zululand</p>	<p>MSTE</p>	<p>Title: <i>Identifying the critical features of the University Staff Doctoral Program. Intentions of the coordinators and academics</i></p> <p>This study examined the experiences of academics in the first generation of the University Staff Development Program (USDP) in South Africa, which aimed to enhance research and teaching capacity in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The objective of the study explored the varied experiences of academics participating in the USDP and the influence of mentors' critical features and beliefs on program implementation. Participants included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six universities: two previously disadvantaged, three advantaged, and one US-based.</li> </ul> <p>Data collected from five academics (three females, two males) and three coordinators (one female, two males) with direct involvement in the program.</p> <p>Theoretical Framework: Variation Theory: Used to analyse how academics experienced the object of learning (USDP) and to understand the dichotomy between focal awareness and background experiences. Methodology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design: Phenomenological research.</li> <li>• Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews.</li> <li>• Data Analysis: Thematic analysis to identify themes and patterns.</li> </ul> <p>The findings highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academics experienced the USDP differently based on the mentors' critical features and beliefs.</li> <li>• The lived object of learning was not homogeneously experienced, influenced by varying focal points and relegated aspects.</li> <li>• Shared expertise among mentors could align the lived object of learning more closely, enhancing program consistency.</li> </ul> <p>Mentorship within the USDP should emphasise sharing expertise and aligning mentor perspectives to create a unified learning experience for participants.</p> <p>Variation Theory provides valuable insights for improving mentorship and program design in professional development initiatives.</p>
<p>7. Dr Elias Moeketsi Dlamini University of the Free State</p>	<p>Education</p>	<p>Title: <i>Using transformative learning theory to prepare the assessment of work-integrated learning of university student teachers</i></p> <p>This study examined the inclusion of student teacher voices in the assessment of work-integrated learning (WIL) in South Africa, addressing a gap in current practices. Despite the development of assessment instruments in 2015 to align with policy requirements for initial teacher education, these instruments often exclude student perspectives. The study aimed to develop a transformative assessment framework for WIL based on Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), ensuring student teachers are actively involved in the assessment process.</p> <p>The methodology was guided by Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and Participatory Action Research (PAR), the study engaged participants collaboratively. Participants included a university teaching practice officer, a lecturer overseeing the teaching practice module, five mentor schoolteachers, ten student teachers participating in a WIL programme at a secondary school.</p> <p>The findings of the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study highlights the importance of including student teachers' voices in WIL assessment processes.</li> <li>• It proposes a new strategy for WIL assessment that incorporates student input, fostering empowerment and engagement.</li> </ul> <p>The research contributes to improving WIL assessment in teacher education by proposing a participatory, student-centred approach. This strategy aligns assessments with transformative learning principles, ensuring they reflect the experiences and insights of all stakeholders.</p>

<p>8. Dr Nokukhanya Ndlovu &amp; Dr Vusi Msiza <i>University of KwaZulu Natal</i></p>	<p>Educational Leadership, Management &amp; Policy</p>	<p><b>Title: Embracing liminality: academic development for early career academics within a community of practice</b> This study explored the experiences of early career academics engaging in academic development through their community of practice. Recognising academic development as a significant and collaborative effort, the authors examine how their shared practices and interactions within this community have supported their academic growth. A collaborative self-study approach was used to reflect on the authors' personal and collective experiences. A metaphorical drawing was employed as a visual tool to represent the rigorous and rewarding practices of the community. Key insights from the study indicated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities of practice are shown to be effective in fostering academic growth, particularly for early career academics navigating the challenges of academic development.</li> <li>Liminal spaces—transitional or in-between spaces—are identified as valuable hubs for collaboration, creativity, and learning within these communities.</li> </ul> <p>The study highlights the potential of liminal spaces and communities of practice to expedite the professional and academic progress of early career academics. It underscores the importance of collective efforts in academic development and advocates for intentionally designed spaces to facilitate collaboration and support.</p>
<p>9. Mr Phindile Shinga <i>University of Fort Hare</i></p>	<p>GIS &amp; Remote Sensing</p>	<p><b>Title: Modelling spatiotemporal patterns of wildfire risk in the Garden Route District biodiversity hotspots using analytic hierarchy process in South Africa</b> This study addressed the growing need for effective wildfire risk management in biodiversity hotspots, focusing on the Garden Route District (GRD) in the Western Cape, South Africa. Using a multi-criteria decision analysis-analytic hierarchy process (MCDA-AHP) model, the research evaluates wildfire risk patterns based on various factors, including human activities, topography, and climate. Methodology adopted data sources: Landsat imagery and WorldClim data (1991–2021); wildfire risk factors were weighted and analysed using overlay methods; validation: the model was tested with MODIS historical fire data from the Global Forest Watch database and Confusion Matrix; and burned areas were mapped using the differenced Normalised Burn Ratio (dNBR). Key findings included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fire Patterns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>53% of the most burned areas accounted for only 12% of actual burns.</li> <li>High-risk zones (11%) show a greater likelihood of wildfire spread and intensification.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Risk Correlations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A weak positive correlation (<math>r = 0.28</math>) exists between historical fire occurrences and burned areas.</li> <li>A negative correlation (<math>r = -0.27</math>) was observed between historical fire occurrences and fire seasons.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Risk Factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human and climatic factors significantly influence wildfire propagation in high-risk zones.</li> <li>Topographic factors play a lesser role, suggesting a lower ignition risk from terrain.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Risk Distribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26% of high-risk zones are concentrated in the southwestern GRD biodiversity hotspots.</li> <li>27% of low-moderate-risk zones are in the northwestern GRD.</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p>The findings provide critical insights for wildfire prevention and management, offering a fire risk-based criterion weighting system to assist decision-makers. This approach can inform both regional and global strategies for mitigating wildfire hazards in biodiversity-rich areas.</p>
<p>10. Dr Mafumo <i>University of Venda</i></p>	<p>Healthcare</p>	
<p>11. Dr Taryn De Vega <i>Rhodes University</i></p>	<p>Journalism &amp; Media Studies</p>	

Presented Research Paper	
Presenter	Discipline
1. Dr Mulelo Makhuvha Nelson Mandela University	Mathematics
<p><i>Title: Studying the Effect of Parasite Switching in Optimal Control Analysis of Sleeping Sickness</i></p> <p>Sleeping sickness, or Human African Trypanosomiasis (HAT), is a neglected tropical disease capable of infecting humans, animals, and Tsetse flies, which act as vectors. Its persistence in communities is due to the ability of the parasite to utilise multiple hosts. The study addresses the dynamics of the disease through a three-species epidemiological mathematical model, focusing on stage-specific treatment and vector trapping as control strategies. Methodology adopted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Model construction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The human population is divided into five compartments, representing distinct stages of the disease.</li> <li>• Two compartments each are used for Tsetse flies and non-human animal reservoirs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Mathematical analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The model's properties were analysed using the effective reproductive number (Rec) to determine equilibrium points and stability conditions.</li> <li>• Bifurcation analysis revealed that <math>Rec &lt; 1</math> alone is insufficient to guarantee disease eradication.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Optimal Control: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pontryagin's Maximum Principle was applied to design an optimal control model for managing the disease.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Key Findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The biting rate of Tsetse flies is the most sensitive parameter influencing disease dynamics.</li> <li>• A combination of vector control and stage-specific treatments is necessary to effectively interrupt disease transmission.</li> <li>• Vector control must be sustained for an extended period to achieve long-term eradication.</li> </ul> <p>The study advocates for integrated control measures, combining vector trapping, medical treatment, and surveillance to manage and eliminate HAT effectively. This approach aligns with the World Health Organization's (WHO) goal to deplete the parasite reservoirs and stop disease transmission.</p>	
2. Ms Bulelwa Stemele University of Fort Hare	Mathematics Education
<p><i>Title: Exploring learner errors and misconceptions in algebraic expressions with Grade 9 learners</i></p> <p>This study investigated Grade 9 learners' errors and misconceptions when solving algebraic expressions, a foundational yet challenging area of mathematics. The research is grounded in the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of learning, which emphasises the role of teachers and manipulatives in facilitating learning within a learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The problem is South African learners perform poorly in mathematics, particularly in algebra, a critical area that underpins further mathematical study and other disciplines. Learners struggle with the abstract nature of algebra, especially variables and equations, leading to errors and misconceptions stemming from a lack of foundational knowledge.</p> <p>A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining tests and learner interviews. Data was collected from 22 Grade 9 learners through a pre-test to identify errors and misconceptions. An intervention using algebra tiles—a manipulative tool for teaching algebraic expressions—was implemented. A post-test was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study confirmed error types found in existing literature, such as incorrect handling of variables, misapplication of rules, and failure to simplify expressions.</li> <li>• The use of algebra tiles significantly improved learners' understanding and performance in the post-test. Manipulatives helped bridge the gap between abstract concepts and concrete understanding, fostering better comprehension of algebraic ideas.</li> </ul> <p>This study supports the use of manipulatives like algebra tiles as effective tools for addressing algebra-related challenges in mathematics classrooms. It adds to the body of research advocating for conceptual teaching approaches to improve learners' engagement and achievement in algebra.</p>	
3. Dr Sibuta University of Johannesburg	Mechanical Engineering
<p><i>Title: Design and Manufacturing of An Air-Filled Travelling-wave Thermo-acoustic Generator</i></p> <p>This study reviewed the role of plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria (PGPR) in plant growth and defence against biotic and abiotic stresses, focusing on rhizosphere chemical communications and tripartite interactions between plants, pathogenic microbes, and beneficial microbes. The objective was to explore rhizosphere communication systems, tripartite interaction mechanisms, and the biochemical implications for plant metabolomes, with a focus on how PGPR induce systemic resistance (ISR) and priming at molecular and metabolic levels. Key Insights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant-Microbe Interactions: PGPR contribute to plant growth and defence through chemical communication in the rhizosphere, yet comprehensive knowledge of these interactions remains limited.</li> <li>• Tripartite Interactions: The interactions among plants, pathogenic microbes, and PGPR influence plant metabolome reprogramming, but the detailed mechanisms are not fully understood.</li> <li>• Metabolomics Applications: Advances in metabolomics have enabled detailed analysis of plant metabolomes and metabolic reprogramming due to tripartite interactions, offering insights into ISR and priming.</li> </ul> <p>The review highlights the need for further investigation into rhizosphere communications and PGPR effects at the molecular and metabolic levels, emphasising the utility of metabolomics in decoding these complex interactions. This work synthesises current knowledge and identifies research gaps in understanding PGPR's role in plant growth and defence, proposing metabolomics as a key tool for advancing this field.</p>	
4. Dr Mpanza University of KwaZulu Natal	Occupational Therapy
<p><i>Title: Aftercare services to people with substance use disorders: analysis of South African policy</i></p>	

	<p>This paper examined the state of substance use aftercare and reintegration policies in South Africa, where limited access to treatment and aftercare services remains a critical issue. The study highlighted the paucity of empirical research on aftercare and the need for alignment with international frameworks to enhance treatment outcomes for individuals with substance use disorders. The study aimed to analyse South African policies for aftercare content and explore how these policies respond to the national and international context, particularly the guidelines set by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The analysis was guided by policy analysis triangle (Walt and Gilson); beer's viable systems model; and thematic analysis of eight selected policies.</p> <p>Key findings of the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over time, South African substance use policies have progressed from excluding aftercare to incorporating minimal provisions for aftercare services.</li> <li>• South African policies primarily reflect an acute treatment model, consistent with the broader South African healthcare system, which focuses on short-term interventions.</li> <li>• Current policies do not fully embrace the chronic treatment approach advocated by the UNODC and WHO, which emphasise long-term recovery and reintegration.</li> </ul> <p>The study advocates for an Integrated Recovery Management Model, tailored to South Africa's local context while aligning with international best practices. Such a model would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen aftercare service delivery.</li> <li>• Address chronic care needs.</li> <li>• Ensure sustainable reintegration for individuals recovering from substance use disorders.</li> </ul> <p>This integrated approach could better support the long-term recovery of individuals and improve national outcomes in substance use treatment.</p>		<p>5. Dr Themba Lukhele <i>University of KwaZulu Natal</i></p>
<p>Development Studies</p>	<p>Title: <i>A Conceptual Framework for Systematic Project Planning Towards the Successful Delivery of Infrastructure Development Projects in the Public Sector</i></p> <p>Infrastructure projects in the public sector aim to meet the needs of stakeholders and beneficiaries, with project success determined by how effectively these needs are addressed. However, traditional methodologies for project planning and management often focus on delivering the physical infrastructure, neglecting the operational environment where the project's outcomes and benefits are realised. This neglect contributes to unsatisfactory outcomes and the failure of many public infrastructure projects to meet their intended goals. Key issues highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis is placed on the physical delivery of infrastructure during planning and execution phases.</li> <li>• Insufficient attention is given to preparing the operational environment, crucial for realising project outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>Importance of the Operational Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The operational phase determines the ability to harvest benefits and sustain value from infrastructure projects.</li> <li>• Many public sector projects fail because the operational environment is not adequately prepared during earlier phases.</li> </ul> <p>The article advocates for integrating the concept of operational readiness into infrastructure project planning and management. This approach emphasises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing the operational environment as part of project planning and execution.</li> <li>• Ensuring a systematic framework to bridge the gap between infrastructure delivery and its operational phase.</li> </ul> <p>A theoretical shift towards systematic project planning and management, with operational readiness as a central component. A foundation for future empirical research to test and refine the framework. Practical insights for improving the delivery and long-term success of public sector infrastructure projects. Adopting this framework could enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of infrastructure projects, ensuring they achieve their intended societal value.</p>	<p>Real Estate, Sustainable Cities</p>	<p>6. Mr Faranani Getha <i>University of the Witwatersrand</i></p>
<p>Childhood Education</p>	<p>Title: <i>Integrating land value capture into infrastructure investment planning in South Africa: a local government framework</i></p> <p>This study explored Land Value Capture (LVC) as an alternative funding model to address South Africa's infrastructure development challenges amidst fiscal constraints and economic contraction. Traditional government funding methods are inadequate to meet the demands of urbanisation and a growing population, necessitating innovative approaches like LVC. The study aims to develop guidelines for the effective implementation of LVC using planning gain and investment theories, addressing its current fragmented application in South Africa.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A qualitative approach was used, analysing five key South African legislative and policy documents selected based on the study's conceptual framework and research questions.</li> <li>• Content analysis was conducted, comparing findings with conceptual guidelines developed in the study, with these guidelines serving as analytical themes.</li> </ul> <p>Findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant inconsistencies exist between current LVC practices, as identified in policy documents, and the study's conceptual framework for successful implementation.</li> <li>• The document analysis highlights disparities in LVC's alignment with principles of planning gain and investment theories.</li> <li>• The study emphasises the need for evidence-based, refined guidelines to ensure LVC supports inclusive urbanisation and drives economic growth effectively.</li> </ul> <p>The research underscores the urgency of adopting LVC as a strategic funding model to expedite infrastructure development and counteract apartheid-era spatial inequities. This study contributes to policy development by proposing actionable guidelines for implementing LVC in South Africa, ensuring alignment with urban growth imperatives and economic inclusivity.</p>	<p>Childhood Education</p>	<p>7. Dr Lerat Ndabezitha <i>University of Johannesburg</i></p>
	<p>Title: <i>A framework for designing and implementing guided</i></p> <p>This study explored the implementation of a pre-service teacher education course on guided play as pedagogy, addressing the gap in preparing teachers to use play-based teaching methods effectively. While play is widely recognised for its role in fostering learning and creativity, the course aimed to align guided play with curricular goals and enhance pre-service teachers' understanding of their guiding role. The research, conducted at the University of Johannesburg, used a design-based research approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants: Bachelor of Education students in the foundation phase of schooling.</li> <li>• Methods: data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, analysis of students' work, and a research journal.</li> </ul>		

8. Dr Aviwe Sondlo University of Zululand	Science Education	<p>The findings of the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The course helped pre-service teachers develop a foundational understanding of guided play and its potential to foster creativity.</li> <li>A significant gap was identified in their comprehension of guiding practices during play-based learning.</li> </ul> <p>This research proposes greater emphasis on the connection between play and creativity. The study contributes to addressing the limited research on teacher preparation for play-based teaching, offering insights to improve pre-service teacher education programmes.</p> <p>Title: <i>The pedagogical orientations of pre-service science teachers towards instructional approaches</i></p> <p>This study investigated the pedagogical orientations of pre-service science teachers in Life Sciences and Physical Sciences, focusing on their instructional approaches and alignment with curriculum goals. The term "orientation" refers to a teacher's beliefs and knowledge about teaching sciences. Pedagogical orientations were classified into two main approaches: direct (Direct Didactic and Direct Active) and inquiry-based (Guided Inquiry and Open Inquiry). The research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quantitative method: Determined the pedagogical orientations, shifts in these orientations over time, and alignment with curriculum goals using the Pedagogy of Science Teaching Test (POSTT) administered to 114 final-year pre-service teachers.</li> <li>Qualitative method: Explored factors influencing the orientations through interviews with eight purposefully selected Physical Sciences pre-service teachers.</li> </ul> <p>The findings of the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preferred pedagogical approaches: pre-service teachers favoured Guided Inquiry as the most appropriate and Direct Didactic as the least appropriate.</li> <li>Shifts in pedagogical orientation: over time, Physical Sciences pre-service teachers exhibited a shift towards inquiry-based approaches.</li> <li>Alignment with curriculum goals: the orientations were consistent with the secondary school curriculum's emphasis on Guided Inquiry.</li> <li>Influencing factors: pedagogical orientations were shaped by school resources, class size, teaching time, pedagogical beliefs, curriculum goals, and content knowledge.</li> </ul> <p>This study highlighted the importance of fostering inquiry-based pedagogical approaches in pre-service science teacher education and addressing contextual factors that influence teaching orientations.</p>
9. Dr Makhaya Malema University of the Western Cape	Sport, Recreation and Exercise Science	<p>Title: <i>Leisure education to leadership: Youth with physical disabilities' experiences in South Africa</i></p> <p>This study explored how leisure education can be used to develop leadership skills in youth with physical disabilities, a group often lacking opportunities for leadership development. The research aimed to understand the perceptions of young people with physical disabilities regarding leisure education as a tool for enhancing their leadership potential. A descriptive qualitative research design was employed, using purposive sampling to select 10 youths with physical disabilities (ages 18–34) in the Western Cape, South Africa. Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured and open-ended interviews. The study found the following findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study identified four main themes and 11 sub-themes.</li> <li>The key findings indicated that participants saw leisure education as a means of building their leadership capacity.</li> <li>Their experiences reflected how leadership opportunities in leisure education contributed to their personal development and ability to take charge of activities within their community.</li> </ul> <p>Leisure education should be considered an effective tool for promoting leadership among youth with physical disabilities in South Africa. This study provides valuable insight into the potential of leisure education for fostering leadership in youth with physical disabilities, contributing to the understanding of their experiences and skill development during such activities.</p>
10. Mr Nyiko Muhluri Khoza UNISA	Statistics	<p>Title: <i>Handling incomplete data using random draws</i></p> <p>This study addressed gaps in current methods for handling missing observations in data. It evaluates the effectiveness of using the HPSPLIT procedure to assess variable importance, comparing data before and after cleaning to demonstrate the procedure's effectiveness. The study argues that missing observations occur randomly, similar to observed data, but emphasizes the importance of preserving data value formats when addressing incomplete data issues. The methodology adopted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study proposes a new method that avoids violating value formats in data, unlike existing techniques that may alter data formats when handling missing values.</li> <li>The new method retains sample size and provides biased estimates when comparing the handled sample to the true population.</li> <li>The study also assessed the reliability of imputation techniques and conducts experiments to evaluate current methods.</li> </ul> <p>The study found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study finds that not all imputation techniques effectively handle missing data.</li> <li>It identified gaps in existing methods and proposes a solution that involves multiplying imputing random draws of observations until convergence is reached, while maintaining data value formats.</li> <li>The proposed method also includes a cleaning step to resolve issues with the random-draw approach.</li> </ul> <p>The proposed method offers a more effective solution for handling missing data by preserving value formats and improving upon current imputation techniques. This study contributes to the understanding of handling missing data, highlighting the importance of value formats and proposing a more reliable technique for imputing missing observations.</p>



**Revitalizing and  
Transforming the  
Academic Profession**

[ngap.co.za](http://ngap.co.za)