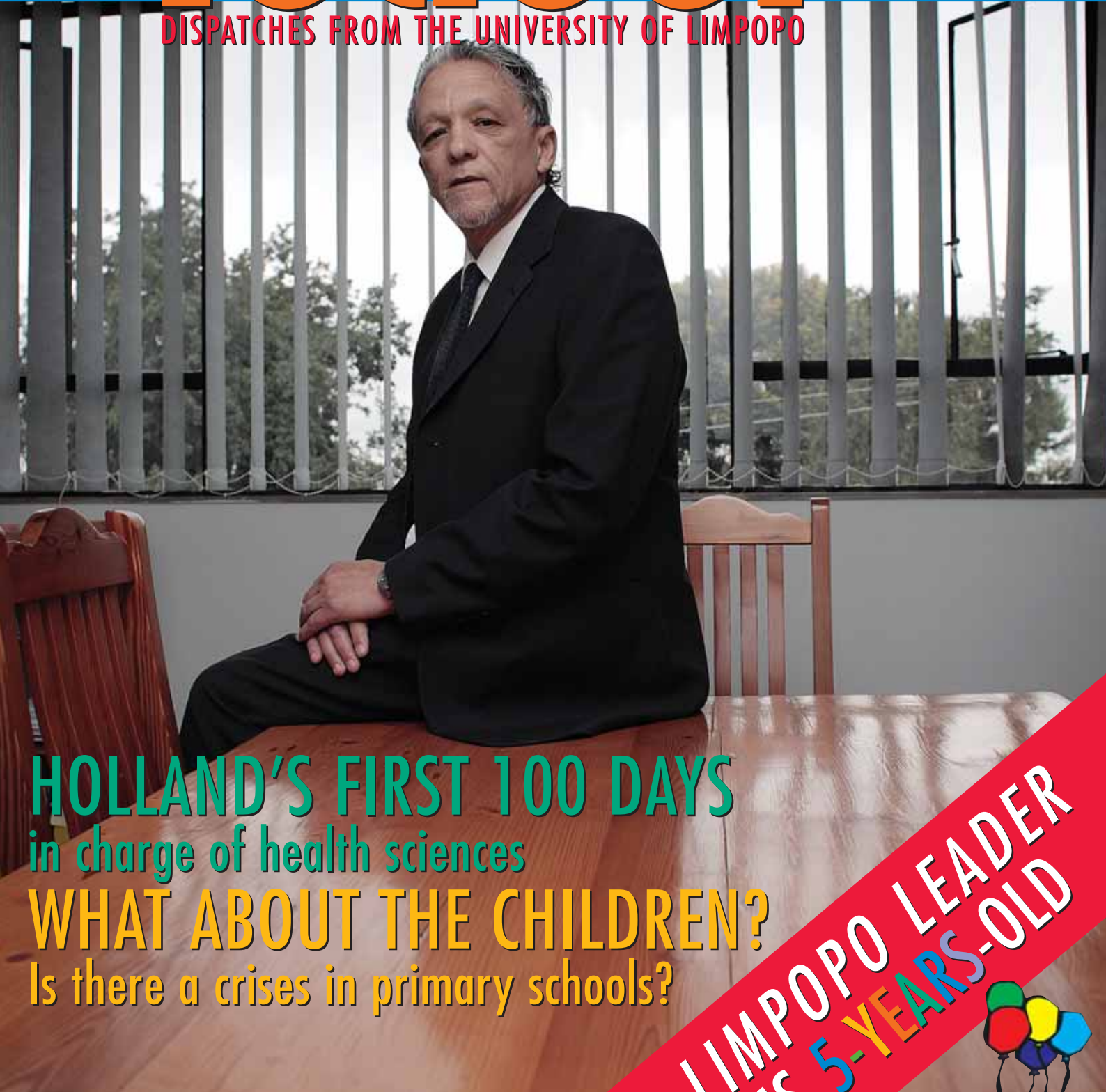


LIMPOPO leader

NUMBER 19
SPRING 2009

DISPATCHES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO



HOLLAND'S FIRST 100 DAYS
in charge of health sciences

WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

Is there a crises in primary schools?

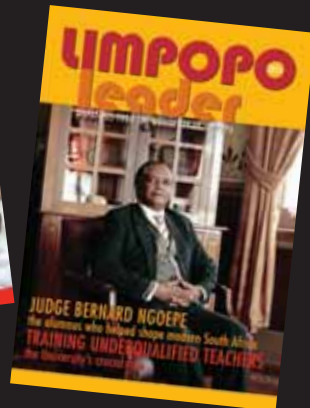
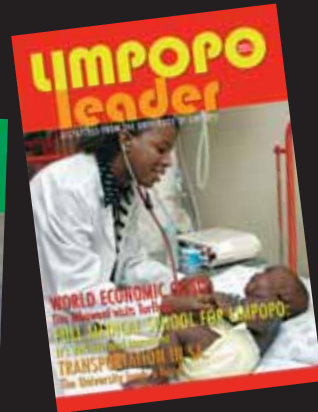
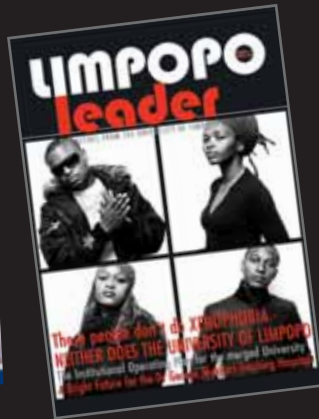
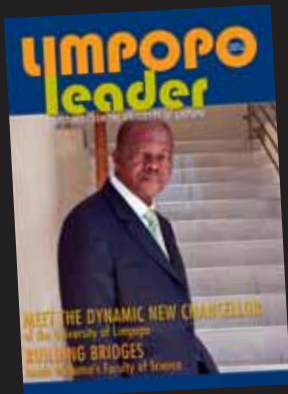
**LIMPOPO LEADER
IS 5-YEARS-OLD**



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LIMPOPO LEADER: Five years old and getting stronger all the time

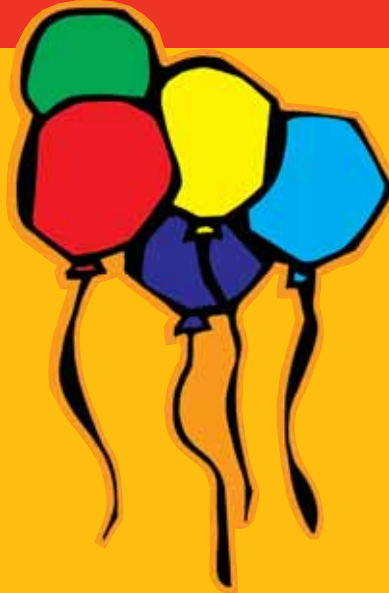
OUR FIRST EDITION WAS DATED AUGUST 2004.

In our fast-moving world, that seems a long time ago now. In 2004, the nation was celebrating a decade of democracy, and South Africa's higher education sector was looking back on ten years of stringent restructuring. For the University of the North and for the Medical University of Southern Africa (Medunsa) this restructuring process would culminate only in January 2005 when the two institutions merged. Since then, the merging process has had its challenges – and it's been a recurring theme in *LIMPOPO LEADER*.

In the Autumn 2005 edition, the merger was fully introduced; and a year later, in *LIMPOPO LEADER 7*, more than a dozen pages were devoted to various aspects of the subject. Numbers 10 and 12 also afforded space to the merger and issue 14 introduced the Institutional Operating Plan that was seen as the culmination of what had often been a tense and laborious process. The point, though, was that *LIMPOPO LEADER* provided the detail – sometimes too much detail, according to some – of a process of vital concern to the whole university community, and to interested parties beyond.

In *LIMPOPO LEADER 11* (Autumn 2007) we published an index to the articles that had appeared in the magazine so far. There were more than 100 of them. Today, that number has virtually doubled, making *LIMPOPO LEADER* an authentic window on the affairs and activities of the university.

Of particular importance to the editorial team that runs the magazine has been the affiliation (virtually non-existent before the introduction of democracy in 1994) that has grown between the university and the province. Equally important have been the increasing relationships with corporate business, and also with the communities in which the university operates. Research efforts on both campuses have been regularly highlighted in *LIMPOPO LEADER*, and the photographs of literally hundreds of university personalities have enlivened its pages.



Who runs the magazine? Overall control lies with the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. In practical terms, the process is controlled by an editorial committee chaired by DK Mahuba, of the University's Marketing and Communications Department. From the same department, Daphney Kgwebane represents the interests of the Medunsa campus. The magazine is edited by David Robbins, a well-known South African writer; it is expertly produced by Gail Robbins of DGR Writing and Research CC; and Clare-Rose Julius manages the advertising and distribution.

'I could write a book about that magazine,' Vice-Chancellor Professor Mahlo Mokgalong is reported to have commented recently. Is that a compliment? Whether it is or not, the comment does indicate that *LIMPOPO LEADER* is difficult to ignore. Increasingly so, in fact. So we must end our five-year celebratory note with a sincere vote of thanks to Professor Mokgalong, and many others on both campuses, for their continuing support and faith in our endeavours.

Here's to the next five years.

Editor

PS: Don't forget to participate in the Reader Survey. Just find the five balloons (and pullout form) on page 32.



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WE'RE FIVE YEARS OLD AND PROUD OF IT! It's been an interesting half decade, to be sure, but one thing is certain: the University of Limpopo becomes more and more interesting. When the magazine was first launched, someone queried whether there was sufficient of even medium interest going on at Turfloop to fill a 32-page quarterly. We knew there was. Then Medunsa came into the picture, and since 2005 we've never had any difficulty filling our pages with what we believe to be high-interest material, both articles and photographs. More often than not, it's been a case of really fascinating subjects queueing for a place in the next issue, or the next after that.

But do our readers agree? That's why this issue contains a reader survey. We appeal to everyone – not least alumni and convocation, as well as friends around the world – to become more interactive. Write to us, fax us, e-mail us – and of course fill in the reader survey questionnaire.

There are several important focus areas in this 19th issue of *LIMPOPO LEADER*. The first relates to the place of the humanities in our hi-tech world. Shouldn't we, for economic-survival reasons, be turning all our attention on the sciences instead? Will that mean a descent into a society without a sense of its own past or of the moral fibre that holds it together? A wise old lady once said: 'But surely science and the humanities are two halves of a single whole.' Turn to page 8 to find some answers. The second focus area, beginning on page 24, highlights the crisis in primary teacher education, not least in the sphere of early childhood development, and what the university is trying to do about it.

The excellence of research in Medunsa's Department of Pharmacology is well worth reading about, and so is the information relating to the recently published King 3 Report on ethics and accountability in big business – as well as in organisations like universities.

Finally, there's a fascinating account of the night Che Guevara's daughter, Dr Aleida Guevara, spoke in Turfloop's Onkgopotse Great Tiro Hall.

EDITORIAL

NEXT ISSUE

ON PAGE 7 OF THIS ISSUE THERE'S A SHORT ARTICLE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF, AND THE DIFFICULTIES SURROUNDING, RESEARCH IN A HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED INSTITUTION LIKE THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO. This teaser paves the way for full coverage in issue 20 of developments and challenges in the research arena. Examples of exciting new research programmes will also be presented. In the same issue there'll be must-read material that links Archbishop Desmond Tutu to cutting edge genetics – and to Turfloop.

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Professor Errol Holland, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, talks about his first 100 days in this position

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HERE'S THE READER SURVEY



The Cuban connection: A REVOLUTION IS CELEBRATED



Dr Aleida Guevara addresses an exuberant crowd in the Great Tiro Hall at Turfloop on Monday evening, 12 October 2009.



Professor Mahlo Mokgalong and Dr Aleida Guevara



SHE'S A WOMAN SHORT OF STATURE, BUT TALL IN TERMS OF COURAGE AND CONVICTION. That might not be surprising, considering her pedigree. She's the daughter of Ernesto (Che) Guevara, the legendary freedom fighter from the Argentine, who believed that the solution to the endemic poverty in South America lay in a revolution across national frontiers. He became heavily involved in Guatemala, Cuba (where he had taken up citizenship after the successful revolution there), and finally in Bolivia where in 1967 he was wounded, captured and then shot by government forces while leading a grassroots guerrilla group there. He was 39 years old.

But his daughter, Dr Aleida Guevara, told her Great Tiro Hall audience that she did not want to speak 'on behalf of my father, but on behalf of my people'.

Dr Guevara was visiting South Africa as part of a Cuban delegation to mark the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution and 15 years of diplomatic relations between Cuba and South Africa. Limpopo was the delegation's first port of call – not surprisingly since 16 Cuban doctors are working in the province, and 26 Limpopo

medical students are currently training in Cuba.

'There are many similarities that unite us as nations,' she told her animated Turfloop audience through an interpreter who translated from her native Spanish. 'But we also have some differences. We need to respect our differences and to know ourselves better. At the same time we need to strengthen the solidarity and co-operation between our countries.' Applause and spontaneous shouts of approval erupted from the audience at these words.

The linkages between socialist Cuba and Africa have always been strong. In the mid-1960s, Che Guevara went to the Congo (later to become Zaire and now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo) where he helped to organise the Patrice Lumumba Battalion, which fought in the Congo civil war. The Cuban involvement in Angola during the recurrent civil strife in the 1970s and 1980s is well known. At one time there were over 30 000 Cuban soldiers deployed in that troubled southern African country. And according to Dr Guevara, over 15 000 African students had studied at Cuban universities by the early 1980s. 'Of course current figures reflect many more

than that now, a quarter of a century later.'

In a short interview with *LIMPOPO LEADER* before the Turfloop public meeting, Dr Guevara described her own two-year sojourn in Angola between 1986 and 1988 as 'shocking and life changing'. She had worked in Luanda as a paediatrician.

'I was appalled by conditions among ordinary Angolans,' she said. 'It is true that I managed to save many children's lives. But sometimes I just couldn't. The sorrow and regret of those moments of failure stay with you forever. They transformed my life. Always, my father had been for me a source of personal inspiration. But it was my Angolan experiences that motivated me to act vigorously against racism, and against the exploitation of human beings generally, and also against the frequent indolence of those people who simply accept things as they are.'

Dr Guevara said this was her first visit to South Africa. In fact, she had arrived in the country only hours before appearing on the Turfloop campus. 'I'm hardly in a position to give my impressions of the country. But I can tell you this: I can already

The Cuban connection: A REVOLUTION IS CELEBRATED

feel the warmth of the people. It's palpable.'

The warmth of the audience – perhaps it was better described as the heat and fervour of the audience – in the Great Tiro Hall brought a smile to Dr Guevara's face. There were 'amandlas' galore, fists in the air, and the sound of the singing trembled deep and rich in the pit of a thousand stomachs.

'I come from a country,' Dr Guevara told her audience, 'that has just completed 50 years of revolution, not just any ordinary revolution but the first socialist revolution in Latin America. Can you imagine what that signifies? It means 50 years of continuous struggle to transform our society, to develop a country with few economic resources, a country that was exploited and humiliated for a long time, a country that was robbed of its riches, but a country that was never totally conquered, because for more than a hundred years people were resilient and fought for total independence.'

In an abridged résumé handed to *LIMPOPO LEADER* it stated that Dr Guevara, like her father, is a Marxist-Leninist and an internationalist. As a medical doctor she is based at the William Soler Children's Hospital in Havana. She is also a scholar and author of the book entitled *Chávez, Venezuela and the New Latin America*. But the happenings in the Great Tiro Hall commanded immediate attention.

Dr Guevara said that in pre-revolutionary times around



20 000 hectares of Cuba's most fertile land had been in the hands of American companies. 'Today our land is non-negotiable.' The cheers rose to the rafters. She seemed small and gentle at the rostrum as she went on to talk about the inequality between rich and poor, the subjugation of some men by others, and the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources. 'Such things should not be tolerated anymore.'

Comparisons with South Africa's history were not missed by the audience. There was in the Great Tiro Hall a definite sense of anti-colonial and anti-repression camaraderie, what someone called a Third World solidarity. Dr Guevara quoted her father as saying that 'solidarity is the tenderness of the people and we fight for that tenderness to be expressed by all'. Solidarity

certainly seemed to be the byword of the hour. Someone else pointed out enthusiastically that 'whoever was not for us must be against us'. There seemed to be no room for doubt or discussion, only for enthusiasm. Dr Guevara was accordingly given an extended standing ovation.

But a more sober normality was soon reinstated. The students dispersed, some no doubt returning to their books and to the painstaking arguments and disagreements surrounding the development of knowledge. Finally, the campus fell silent. The empty spaces seemed the richer for the Cuban visit, yet with vague reminders of ambivalence (in the style of the famous grove where Plato discoursed with his disciples) remaining in the shadows.

Research

WHAT'S IN THE PIPELINE FOR THE SECOND PILLAR?



The man and his plan: Make sure you read the next issue of *LIMPOPO LEADER* to find out more.

'RESEARCH IS THE SECOND PILLAR IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF QUALITY TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS,' SAYS THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO'S NEW DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION, PROFESSOR RACHMOND HOWARD.

'There are three pillars which are interdependent. The first is teaching and the third is community engagement. In many respects it is the research component that provides the glue. Teaching without vigorous research is all too often impoverished teaching; and if community engagement doesn't lead to new areas of research into the needs of real people, community engagement programmes become mere philanthropy.'

The vision of the University of Limpopo acknowledges the importance of research. It is to be a world-class African university which responds to education, research and community development needs through partnerships and knowledge generation. Really, when one thinks about it, knowledge generation defines the research function perfectly. Teaching is knowledge transmission and community engagement is knowledge in practical use. So it seems appropriate to call research 'the second pillar' since

the others lean quite substantially upon it.

It should come as no surprise therefore that research output is also a means of establishing the quality of a university. It is certainly used, among other elements such as a university's size and performance, to determine the amount of funding that flows into the university from the State.

How does the University of Limpopo fare in the research stakes? The simple answer is: not all that well. But this reply needs to be placed in its proper historical perspective. Listen to Howard again.

'Historically, the main focus of the University of Limpopo, like most other historically disadvantaged universities (those racially exclusive institutions that had been created in the 1960s and 1970s to support separate development), was on teaching and learning and far less on research. Compared to the old historically advantaged institutions (the mainstream English and Afrikaans universities), research organisation, research infrastructure and facilities – especially in the now much-needed areas of science and technology – still remain largely underdeveloped.'

Howard quotes from a 1997 report entitled *South Africa:*

a science and technology profile which states unequivocally that 'most research capacity is confined to the previously white universities. The historically black universities have only recently been able to start developing their research capacity'.

Howard continues: 'While this 12-year-old report indicates some move towards developing capacity, the reality is that much remains to be done to build the research capability at institutions like the University of Limpopo.'

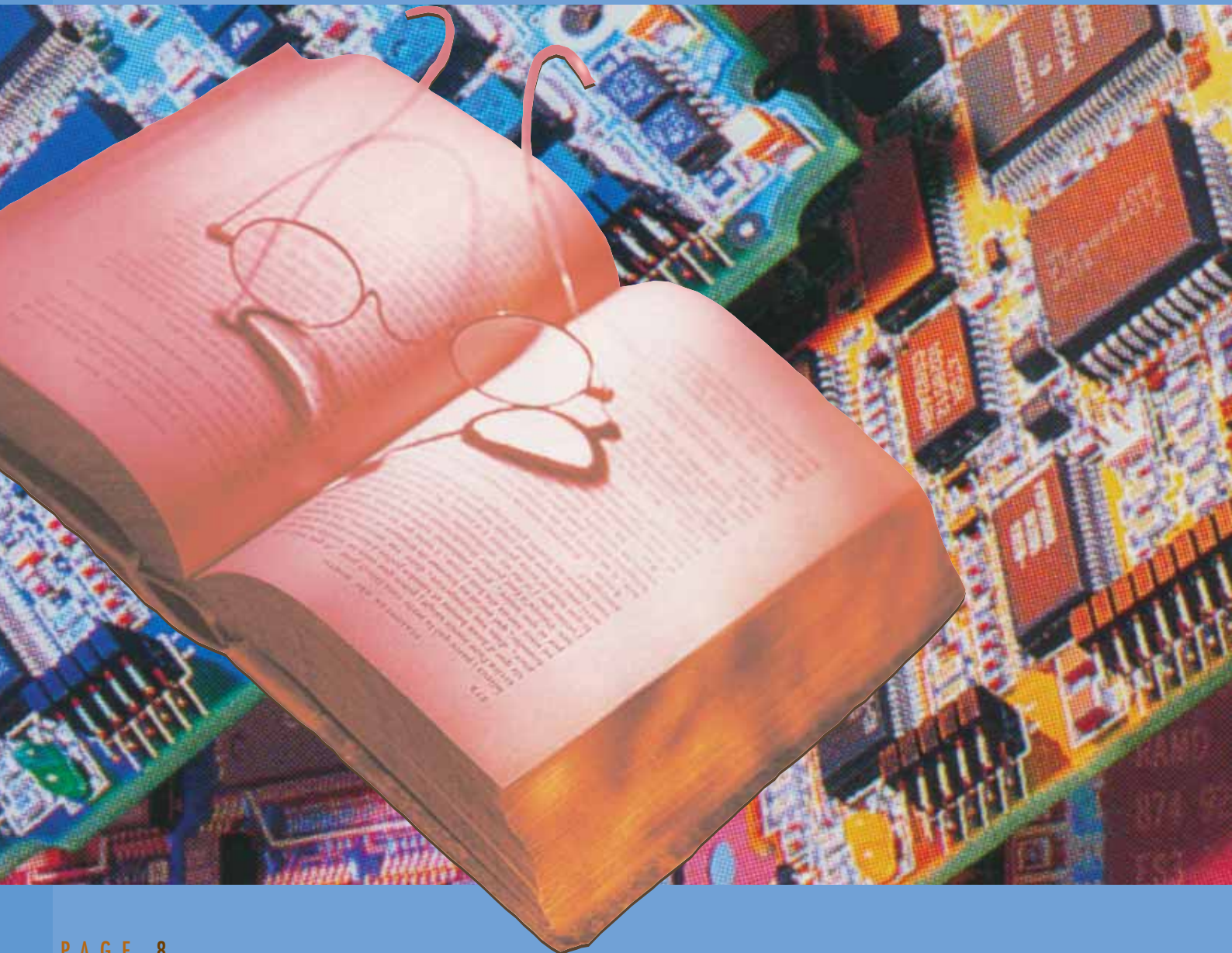
In pursuit of building and guiding research at both Medunsa and Turfloop, and within 12 days of his appointment as Director of Research Development and Administration, the newly-installed Howard produced a document entitled *Draft guiding framework for improvement of the research office and research*.

But who actually is this new man, and what's his plan? Readers will have to wait for the next issue of *LIMPOPO LEADER*, issue 20, due out in January/February 2010. Then, all will be revealed surrounding this vital subject as the University of Limpopo works to close the historical gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged.

Sciences and Humanities

THE PLACE OF THE HUMANITIES IN OUR HI-TECH WORLD

In a famous lecture given 50 years ago, novelist/scientist C P Snow warned that science and arts were becoming 'two cultures'. The lecture aroused years of controversial debate. Was a classical (humanities-based) education still relevant in an age of great scientific and technical advance? Was a science-based education as valid an intellectual training as one based in the classics? 'There is only way out of this,' said Snow himself, 'and that is by rethinking our education.' What are the implications for South Africa and the University of Limpopo?





Professor Nhlanhla Maake and Professor Hlengani Siweya

DO THE HUMANITIES HAVE A PLACE IN MODERN EDUCATION? In a world – and particularly in a country – trying to come to terms with the technological revolution, the balance between the two main branches of human understanding sometimes does seem a bit one-sided. In other words, the emphasis in South Africa seems to be increasingly in favour of the sciences. It's a survival thing. It's got to do with the technological skills necessary to make our way successfully in the global economy.

But the imbalance is not as simple as it might sound. For a long time, particularly in South Africa's previously disadvantaged institutions, the humanities far outweighed the sciences. There were good reasons for this. The growing demand for better qualified black civil servants in the 1980s particularly, and particularly among school teachers, led the authorities to link promotions with tertiary education in any discipline. This encouraged people towards such subjects as sociology and religious studies as the 'softer options' on the road to promotion and higher pay.

This trend produced two broad and equally undesirable results. The first was that the sciences tended to be underserved, a trend that was stimulated by the serious deficiencies in the country's schooling system. The second was that, almost unwittingly, the humanities were downgraded simply because students considered many of the humanities disciplines as soft or easy – or at least easier than the basic sciences.

The result was that by 1994 there was a preponderance of humanities students in the old homeland universities, like the University of the North. If management and law are classed as 50/50 between the two main disciplines, then humanities students on the Turfloop campus still outnumber science students by 7 645 to 5605.¹ Of course the inclusion of Medunsa into the University of Limpopo has swung the figures in favour of the sciences. This means that the merged university is probably already fairly close to the parity between the humanities and the sciences that the State is seeking for all tertiary institutions by 2014.

So, what's the problem? In a nutshell, the increasing economic importance of the sciences – and their practical manifestation in technology – has raised the matter of the place of the humanities in the broader scheme of things. If the economic terrain is as it is, wouldn't it be better to have more revenue-earning scientists and technologists and fewer historians, philosophers, ethicists, artists, writers, theologians and specialists in indigenous and foreign languages?

This is by no means a new argument. 'The tendency,' remarks Pieter Nagel, head programme co-ordinator of the Department of Communication Studies in Turfloop's Faculty of Humanities, 'towards making academia into a battlefield between the two great branches of human endeavour seems to resurface every few decades to become an agenda for academic discussion.'

Nagel cites several examples.

- In 1996 American intellectual Gregory Davis published a paper on *The Role of Humanities in Our Modern Technological Society*, in which he contends that the humanities act as a balance to the unchecked use of technology and domination of human thinking by science.
- Exactly 50 years previously, in 1959, the English novelist and scientist C P Snow spoke at Cambridge University on the topic 'The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution'. This paper and the several books that soon followed became a landmark in the historic battle for supremacy between the two fields.
- As far back as 1882, English poet and essayist Matthew Arnold had already discussed the topic in 'Literature and Science', in which he asked 'whether or not a classical education was still relevant in an age of great scientific and technical advance.'

But what's the thinking closer to home? To find out, *LIMPOPO LEADER* asked the two relevant executive deans, Professor Nhlanhla Maake and Professor Hlengani Siweya for their views.

¹ 2008 figures

Professor Maake's dictum: UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN CONDITION

THE STARTING POINT TO AN APPRECIATION OF THE PLACE OF THE HUMANITIES IN OUR LIVES – AND IN OUR EDUCATION – IS THAT THEY DEAL WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS RAISED BY PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY. How do we relate to ourselves, to our fellow human beings, and to issues of spirituality? In short, the humanities are about understanding the human condition.

Seen from this starting point, science and technology are in fact supplementary to the humanities. Certainly, the sciences have helped us more fully to understand our world, its position in the cosmos, and the position of humanity in the complex physical environment in which we find ourselves. In that sense, the sciences have enriched our understanding of ourselves.

But it is on the technological side – in other words, the application of the sciences in the quest for more and more production and consumption – that real danger lies. In the 20th century, and even more so in our current century, the sciences have become more and more utilitarian. They have been harnessed to economics, to wealth creation, to increased luxury for some, and of course to weapons of increasing destructive power. The increasing pre-eminence of science and technology has seen a reversal of the balance of power in relation to the humanities. Are we, in consequence, losing our sense of commonality as human beings? I think there is that danger.

What seems certain is that the developed world is getting wealthier, while the developing world is struggling even to maintain the gap that exists between the two worlds. The result is a restlessness in the world, an anxiety among developed nations and an increasing anger among those nations and cultures that perceive themselves as excluded. Is this because we have forgotten that we are human beings? Is it because we no longer know so clearly where we have come from and where we think we should be going? In an ideal world, should history and philosophy and

the cultural knowledge that invariably underpins our consciousness of ourselves remain subservient to mathematics and the ability to extract gold with microbes, and to divert rivers regardless of the ecological costs? I think not.

There seems to be neither a universal understanding of the human condition, nor any deep appreciation of what it means to be human. What's constructive and what's destructive? These questions seem too often to be answered only on the basis of retaining wealth or power? The world is pulling and falling apart, and one perceives a deep need to reconnect with our humanity, to acknowledge the humanity of others, and to do things ethically rather than only with self-gain uppermost in our minds.

It is interesting that in some English universities, the foundation year involves students in 14 modules, equally divided between sciences and humanities. This is in direct response to the realisation that huge damage was done (all through the 20th century) to the planet, and to the human psyche, by science and technology without the counterbalance of the humanities. Among the concerns which haunt human kind in the 21st century is the breakdown of human relations, pollution of the earth and the atmosphere, global warming and its apocalyptic consequences, depletion of natural resources, the build-up of destructive scientific inventions, genetic mutation, far more than celebration of what science has achieved. Far be it from me to say this with the intent of undermining the beneficial endowments of scientific knowledge, but I cannot over-emphasise that the drawing board lies in the humanities, which are arguably the cradle of scientific knowledge.

Our response to the humanities is all too often reactive, and on occasion even dismissive. We need to make our response proactive. We need to restore their central place in our education system before it's too late.

Professor Siweya's hypothesis: PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE ARE THE SAME THING

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT WE LEARN TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

Technology is the use to which scientific knowledge has been put, for evil sometimes, but also for great benefit to humankind. To question the moral potency of science, based on its uses, would be similar to questioning the validity of the philosophical processes because they have sometimes given rise to evil doctrines such as totalitarianism or racism.

In fact, philosophy and science are actually the same thing. Both the humanities and the sciences attempt to answer the questions that arise as we seek for greater understanding of ourselves, and of ourselves in relation to our environment – the world and the universe. Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of the humanities is the way in which they arrive at conclusions: they appear to depend too much on existing beliefs and how well their arguments are received. In fact, a humanities scholar is likely to be believed more by society than his scientific counterpart, partly because the former appeals to conscience while the latter relies on evidence, mainly through experimentation.

In addition, there can be no doubt that scientific advances have made huge impacts upon the scope and direction of the humanities. For example, Margot Waddell investigated the impact of science ideas on the writings of George Elliot; Isaac Newton had an important influence on poetry; and Charles Darwin's ideas greatly influenced the self-perceptions of humanity.

Or think of the impact made in the early 17th century by Copernicus and Galileo when they realised that the earth revolved around the sun, and not the other way around as had been believed since the days of Egyptian astronomer Ptolemy over a thousand years before. Undoubtedly, this changed the way philosophers thought about our position in the universe; and it took the church over 300 years to apologise for its harsh treatment of the brilliant astronomer and mathematician Galileo.

But it would be a grave mistake for a debate of this nature to be reduced to point scoring by one side or the other. In our highly specialised world, the differences are emphasised by the continuously increasing depth of all branches of human study. As antidote, we need to remember the archetypal so-called 'Renaissance man' of the 19th century who stood astride the humanities and sciences, equally versed in classical literature and architecture, for example, as he was in the new-fangled 'science' of palaeontology and the novel technological advances in physics and chemistry that were laying the foundations for photography.

One particular myth needs to be dispelled. It's the myth that depicts scientists as white-coated obsessives crouched over laboratory equipment, as innocent of the moral consequences of their alchemy as they are of their own humanity. To counter this myth, I would refer you to perhaps the 20th century's greatest scientist, Albert Einstein. His moral qualms over the development of nuclear weapons are well known. In fact, he was an intensely human man, as the following quotation shows.

'Strange is our situation here on earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that man is here for the sake of other men – above all for those upon whose smiles and well-being our own happiness depends.'

I would like to end with a final reference to 'Renaissance man', that happy 19th century figure who seemed equally at home in both the humanities and sciences. Certainly, with the growth of knowledge, such broad sensibilities are not easy to emulate in a single human being. But we should strive for a collective model. Indeed, isn't that what a university is, where science and humanities can properly co-exist and intermingle for the enrichment of both sides of the equation? Such a dynamic model would be my wish for our own university.

Creativity for progress

MUCH MORE THAN THE MONEY

THEY DIDN'T WIN THE GRAND PRIZE, BUT THEY CAME BACK WITH REWARDS GALORE. These are the bald facts behind the University of Limpopo's participation in the Sanlam Creativity for Progress Challenge for 2009.

A team of five students from the Department of Communication Studies on the Turfloop campus got right through to the finals in Cape Town. Only four teams from the ten competing universities remained in the competition at that stage: University of the Western Cape, University of the Free State, University of Pretoria, and the Turfloop team. The University of the Free State won. The remainder were honourable runners up – and much richer for the experience.

Listen to Surprise Mazibila, one of the Turfloop team, who wrote to the Executive Dean of Humanities on his return from Cape Town: 'Dear Prof Maake,² It is with gratitude that I write this letter. Your office has proved that indeed our university is on a quest to find solutions for Africa.' Even more significantly, Mazibila (21) went on to say that 'I always thought it was a curse to be a student in a rural university like ours. It was not until I went to Cape Town that everything made sense for the first time. What I learned there is that development is not a one-week achievement. It takes determined individuals equipped with financial and human support. I believe that this university and the entire province will prosper when it is realised that education should play a central role as we voyage vision-ward.'

The other members of the Turfloop contingent – they called themselves Team Zodiac – were team leader Emanuel Sekokotla (22), Aubrey Mothombeni (21), Beauty Mphahlele (21) and Nkateko Sono (27). All five are third year BA students majoring in Communications.

But what did the Creativity for Progress Challenge actually consist of?

The subject that the teams tackled – there were 14 teams from Turfloop alone – was 'rural

sustainability' and how to invest in it. The brief was broad but explicit: 'The exodus of skilled and educated workers from rural areas poses a serious threat to the social and economic vitality of rural South Africa.' How, asked Sanlam, did the student teams think the situation could be remedied so that economic stagnation in the countryside could be curbed?

Sanlam put its money where its question was: over a million Rands in prizes for the best ideas. The winning university faculty and the winning student team would receive R150 000 and R100 000 respectively, while the three runner-up faculties who made it to Cape Town would receive R50 000 each, with their student teams receiving R30 000 each. And even before the finals had been reached, Team Zodiac had collected R10 000 for being the winning team out of Turfloop's 14 entrants.

'At first it was the money that encouraged us to participate,' Team Zodiac members admitted. 'But as the work took hold, there seemed to emerge in all of us a higher motive. We were working as a team. We were doing something for the country. We were being challenged. We were building our empowerment. These things provided an incentive that seemed more powerful even than the money.'

What Team Zodiac actually did was to develop a rural economic plan based on agricultural downstreaming in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality area. So these five humanities students got involved in conducting an extensive socio-economic baseline study, dealt with some of the technicalities of agriculture and economics as they isolated the produce that lent itself to local agro-processing, and then worked out the economic and social benefits.

Team Zodiac began its research in March and ended in time for the internal presentations on 1 August 2009. The Team's business case was contained in a 38-page final report that dealt with

² Professor Nhlanhla Maake.



Mr Nagel and Team Zodiac

such Lowveld agricultural produce as tomatoes, citrus, avocados, bananas, mangoes, guavas and macadamia nuts, and how appropriate investment in agro-processing could generate revenue locally, where unemployment was much higher than in the cities where most down-streaming currently takes place.

Do these concerns seem strange for students studying Communications? Not to programme co-ordinator Pieter Nagel. 'Communication Studies,' he asserts, 'is an example of a subject area that has an interdisciplinary nature to it. The subject clearly demonstrates that an inclusive approach to the sciences and humanities debate is one that pays off. In some academic institutions it is classified among the social sciences, in others among the language sciences. Our students come from diverse fields of research, including languages, media, psychology, and information sciences.'

'Our lecturer – Mr Nagel – believed in our ideas,' Team Zodiac members said. 'That was a major incentive for us.'

If the lure of the prize money had to an extent been eclipsed by these other incentives, the prospect of flying to Cape Town for the finals eclipsed almost everything. None of the five Team Zodiac members, all from the rural areas of Limpopo, had ever flown before, and none had ever been to Cape Town. Their

reports to the Executive Dean on their return provides an inkling of what participation in the Sanlam Creativity for Progress Challenge, and particularly their trip to the other end of the country, had actually meant to these young Limpopans.

'The most disappointing moment for us,' wrote Beauty Mphahlele, 'was losing the competition to Free State University. Other than that, everything was fun-filled, exciting and a little scary (specifically Table Mountain). After the formal do, we visited a number of places of which Robben Island topped the list – because we boarded a ship and it was very exciting. Mr Nagel was a wonderful tour guide who drove us around the whole time we were in Cape Town.'

Team leader Emanuel Sekokotla wrote: 'Even though we were beaten for the grand prize, I believe that by now all who were present know that the University of Limpopo is a force to be reckoned with. I wish to say thank you for believing in us and making our trip a memory to be cherished for many years to come.'

And Aubrey Mothombeni said: 'I would like to thank our Faculty and facilitator for encouraging us to take part in the competition and for helping us to realise our potential; and to my team members I would like to say, you guys are such a blessing and were the right people to work with. Keep it up.'

We say the same to Sanlam and to everyone involved.

HOLLAND'S FIRST 100 DAYS

It's a good journalistic idea – to find out how senior decision-makers are faring after 100 days in office. Presidents Barack Obama and Jacob Zuma had their turns at this kind of scrutiny. Now it's the turn of the recently appointed Dean of the University of Limpopo's Faculty of Health Sciences, a position that is not infrequently called the most difficult job in the institution. What do you think?

PROFESSOR ERROL HOLLAND'S FIRST 100 DAYS AT THE HELM OF UL'S FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES AT MEDUNSA HAVE BEEN CHARACTERISED BY THE BITTER-SWEET CONTRADICTIONS SO PECULIAR TO SOUTH AFRICA.

'On the one hand we have the power of the present; being a part of the decision-making executive of a socially-responsive institution that's committed to making an impact on the lives of communities around it. On the other hand it has brought me into direct contact with the travesty of the misguided notions of the past that blocked access to education for so many of our people. It serves as a painful reminder of the waste of potential that was never nurtured – and that no doubt still retards our efforts to be a truly great nation,' he reflects.

But the cameo experiences of these 100 days; the incidental interactions he's had with students on a daily basis; the handwritten notes expressing confidence in him; these are the aspects of the job that highlight the positive direction that the university – as well as society in general – is taking. It's these things that encourage Holland to evaluate the perceptions he has gleaned in terms of the need for equity when planning for excellence within the faculty. His plans match his dreams. They're big.

'The first step is identifying potential for success. We must make sure that we do what's necessary for youngsters going through the system to be able to cope with higher education. At this stage there is uncertainty whether senior certificate exam results give enough indication of the likelihood of success in university. Often the opposite plays out, with students who achieved excellent results struggling with university studies.'

Holland says that for this reason, Medunsa, together with other higher education institutions, has issued a directive that applicants to the Health Sciences Faculty will need to write a national benchmark test developed by the Council for Higher Education of SA that tests a wide range of basic competencies of prospective students. 'We'll then match the performance within the first three years of study in the faculty against the test results and use the information to develop support programmes for students, as well as fine-tune our selection criteria.'

Providing student support to improve the graduation rate is another area that Holland says will receive attention. Students completing their studies in the minimum time allowed means that the university receives full funding from the Department of Education

for every graduate, and it also improves the profile of the university. The aim is to provide support for students who have potential, but whose educational background has placed them at a disadvantage. 'This support will not only help them to succeed in their studies, but will also give them the impetus to excel in future studies,' he adds.

To this end, the university plans to offer an extended degree programme for students who have the requisite high school results, but who missed out on being accepted to study medicine. This is a one-year bridging course and gives students who pass all their subjects and demonstrate their abilities an opportunity to be accepted into first-year Medicine the following year.

The next area that Holland is focusing on is an improved environment. 'Creating a proper environment for learning is essential and for this reason we will be tireless in motivating for state of the art facilities for our students. Yes, upgrading facilities is a challenge in these tough economic conditions, but basic needs such as comfortable lecture halls, sufficient good quality living quarters, and facilities for leisure and sport are vital for optimal learning.

'Our ultimate aim is to build facilities with advanced electronic

teaching and learning equipment because I believe that this will help to neutralise the disadvantages of the past. We need generous sponsors to reach this goal; but that's not impossible and I'm sure that it will ensure a great blossoming of talent among our students.'

And while Medunsa has always been a community-focused campus; this is an area that is increasingly important in Holland's eyes 'in our quest to be an institution of social relevance and to produce health professionals who truly care'. This quest will see the introduction of an undergraduate programme that is well rooted in communities to serve as a foundation for an intense postgraduate research programme. Holland points out that creating an environment suitable for optimal physical and mental development as well as social well-being demands a comprehensive approach. For this reason, Medunsa will join forces with other UL faculties to establish outreach activities that will help to improve the quality of life in vulnerable communities.

'We plan to gain the confidence and trust of the communities we serve and to work with private partners to make a meaningful impact on their lives.' Holland believes that now is the time for scientific



Professor Errol Holland

solutions for under-development, and maintains that institutions of higher learning must take a leadership role in this regard.

'We find ourselves in a situation of having to be leaders in communities that are impoverished and vulnerable. The responsibility has been placed on us and it requires an orchestrated effort by every individual in this institution to accept this position and embark on concrete activities. The fact is that we will only succeed as a

society when the least members, the most vulnerable people, are raised to a level that is consistent with the values of an enlightened society.

'We need to be champions of our communities – and so ultimately serve as a model for South Africa, and even the rest of the world.'

These are plans and dreams that augur well for the future of the university, its people, and the communities around it.

ETHICS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND KING 3

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES OFFER REAL BENEFITS

‘TO BE A WORLD-CLASS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE RESPONDING TO EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS; AND STRIVING TO TRAIN QUALITY HEALTHCARE WORKERS WITH EMPATHY, CONSCIOUSNESS AND PASSION FOR COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH.’

That’s the mission of the University of Limpopo’s Faculty of Health Services on the Medunsa campus.

To achieve it requires excellent governance, efficient structures and processes, exacting management standards, and highly committed people – and it’s doable, says Professor Solomon Rataemane, Medunsa’s former interim Deputy VC: Student and Corporate Affairs, and Head of the Psychiatry Department.

Rataemane, through his positions on the Medical Research Council (MRC) as Vice-Chairperson, Chairperson of the Finance Committee, and member of the Audit and the Risk committees, was involved in the review of elements of ethics in the King 2 and King 3 reports (see box on page 18)

He says that in broad terms the King 3 report is about the proper governance of decision-making within an organisation – particularly with regard to financial and risk management, and human resources. It’s about having the right structures in place for effective accountability processes. ‘The governance practices that are recommended in the report offer real and practical benefits to organisations that implement them.’

Rataemane outlines his understanding of Medunsa’s good governance status, as well as a number of suggestions he has gleaned from his experience within this discipline.

RIGHT DIRECTION

Medunsa is moving in the right direction in terms of governance practices, he maintains. ‘It does have

some distance to cover to be the school described in its mission, but that’s not surprising. It’s been down a tough road over the past few years. The uncertainty of its future that was raised by the merger contributed; as did the fact that the campus had acting deans and acting campus principals for a few years. It’s a mistake to expect people who have full departments to run, to cope with running the campus as well. It cannot be done effectively.’

There were areas that tended to get sidelined during the transitional phase, ‘but now that substantial appointments have been made at the top level, we are likely to see tremendous improvement in our overall governance practices’.

Medunsa’s undergraduate programme is of an excellent standard, and to sustain this, the university must keep close to guidelines of King 3, primarily in financial management, quality assurance, regular audits, and effective communications with all stakeholders and the outside world.

EVALUATING FOR QUALITY

Rataemane says that the first step to good organisational governance is to ensure that from the top down, every management and committee structure has a clear mandate to strive towards. And that every structure has its performance evaluated in terms of that mandate.

And even though the University of Limpopo is evaluated as a whole, it is essential that Medunsa has its own evaluation processes to ensure that what the faculty is offering is appropriate to the needs of the country, and that it conforms wholly to medical standards.

The faculty must align itself with standards established by relevant external organisations, such as the College of Medicine of South Africa, the Health Professions Council of South Africa, and others, as



Professor Solomon Rataemane

well as various activities of the departments of Health and Education. Medunsa must also make sure that it meets international medical standards.

Evaluations against set standards are vital for quality assurance. 'Through these evaluations we need to assess total and departmental outputs, financial strength, our ability to raise funds, and our ability to ensure the smooth running of programmes.'

Rataemane says that departmental evaluations against targets are an important part of the process, and believes that each department must submit an annual report.

In terms of evaluations within the upper echelons of the university's structures, external evaluations should be conducted as internal evaluations can be skewed and less than objective. This is being done to an extent, and will increase in future.

FINANCIAL AUDITING

Rataemane's MRC experience has given him insight into the value of stringent 'by the book' financial principles and processes.

Every structure within Medunsa must have clear guidelines as to exactly what steps to go through to put projects out for tender. 'We have a responsibility to manage the funds entrusted to us and we're accountable to ensure that our targets can be reached with the funds we have.' He adds that all financial expenditure within an organisation must be debated and assessed within proper structures, ensuring that they are in line with overall financial policies.

'A key to successful financial management is strong focus on the risks that the organisation faces, and on ensuring that proper management processes are in place to deal with the risks.'

HUMAN RESOURCES

Drilling down to the people component of Medunsa's resources, Rataemane believes the obvious is worth stating because too often procedures are not followed properly, which leads to confusion and unhappiness.

The appointment of staff must follow prescribed procedures – and new appointees throughout the ranks must be given job descriptions, clear contracts, and accurate information on the process that will be followed if the staff member doesn't comply with the requirements.

'Over and above the contract, employees must go through periodic performance reviews. Employees cannot be found guilty of non-performance if they're not given adequate feedback. It's also on these reviews that performance bonuses should be determined.'

WINNING THE DAY

In closing, Rataemane exhorts his colleagues to be proud of Medunsa and to firmly commit to honesty in all things, to hard work, and to the guiding principles that drive the faculty.

'Embrace self-evaluation as a matter of habit. We must ask ourselves, what am I supposed to be doing in terms of my responsibilities in my job – whether it's within the academic or the support programmes; and

ETHICS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND KING 3

is there progress in my own development? Am I fulfilling my responsibilities to publish, to attend conferences, and to showcase our university's expertise? Am I ensuring responsible use of all resources – time, monetary, human and facilities?'

Rataemane believes that if Medunsa's staff strive to achieve these goals, the combined result of these efforts will lead to the university being an institution of true excellence in education.

KING 3 IS ABOUT EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

GOVERNANCE RELATES TO DECISIONS THAT DEFINE EXPECTATIONS, GRANT POWER, OR VERIFY PERFORMANCE. Good governance would seem to be a given. Just about every organisation understands its value and the need for it. It can, however, be illusive if there are not enough checks and balances in place to make sure it stays on track.

The first King Report, headed by past Supreme Court Judge Mervyn King, was launched in 1994 under the instruction of the Institute of Directors. It contained a code of corporate practices and conduct and endorsed the primary characteristics of corporate governance. This was replaced by the King 2 Report in 2002 and King 3 in September this year.

King 3, according to Pricewaterhouse Coopers, was necessary because of changes in local and international governance. It was designed to apply to all entities, regardless of how they're structured; its principles are drafted on the basis that if they're adhered to, any organisation would be practising good governance.

The aim of King 3 was to be at the forefront of governance internationally. 'This has been achieved by focusing on the importance of reporting annually on how an organisation has positively and negatively affected the economic and social life of the community in which it operated.'

Organisations across the country – including higher education institutions such as UL – are taking steps to evaluate themselves against the recommendations and guidelines outlined in this dynamic report to ensure that they meet their objectives.

The report places great emphasis on leadership, sustainability, and corporate citizenship; covering sections on risk management, sustainability reporting,

accounting and auditing, and compliance and enforcement, as well as issues such as ethics, integrity and disclosure.

It encourages self-regulation, in which an organisation monitors its own adherence to legal and ethical standards. 'This approach allows organisations to maintain control over the standards to which they're held by successfully policing themselves.'

Good governance, it continues, is essentially about effective leadership. 'Leaders need to define strategy, provide direction and establish ethics and values that will influence and guide practices and behaviour with regard to sustainability.'

King 3 says that five moral duties apply to leadership in any organisation – conscience: intellectual honesty and avoiding conflicts of interest; exercising care; competence: having the requisite skill; commitment; and courage in decision-making.

'Responsible leadership is characterised by the ethical values of accountability, responsibility, fairness, and transparency. Responsible leaders build organisations by having regard for the economic, social and environmental impact on the community in which it operates – through effective strategy and operations.

'Responsible leaders do business ethically rather than being satisfied with regulatory compliance. They embrace an ethical culture that sees leaders following ethical standards; the interests of stakeholders being taken into account; activities being conducted with integrity, fairness and vision; and fair competition practices being followed. An ethical culture never sees poor performance being blamed on the exercise of good ethical standards.'

The bottom line is that good governance is the only viable option.



THE WIDE AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF PHARMACOLOGY

TO THOSE NOT IN THE KNOW, PHARMACOLOGY COULD SOUND LIKE A DRY SUBJECT. Generally speaking, it's the science of drug action on biological systems. But its reach is so wide that it impacts on just about every aspect of life: as a science it's basic to medicine, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry, and veterinary medicine; while it also incorporates knowledge of the sources, properties, effects and therapeutic uses of drugs.

The chief proponent of this all-embracing subject at Medunsa is Professor Willem du Plooy, Head of the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, both at the university and Dr George Mukhari Hospital (DGMH).

Du Plooy finds the endless revelations of previously unknown facts and the ongoing discoveries of how to improve research methods a daily fascination – and his enthusiasm is completely contagious. It's about 'creating new knowledge' – to put it in the words of astronaut Neil Armstrong.

The Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics is listed as one of the School of Medicine's Centres of Excellence for its exceptional research. It was started in 1980 by Professor Pieter Joubert, the first Head of the Department and still an Honorary Professor. 'His main interest was cardiovascular pharmacology – and to this day, it is one of the areas we specialise in,' says Du Plooy.

The department teaches medical, dental, physiotherapy, and nursing undergraduate students the principles of drug action with emphasis on drugs used in the different professions. Medical graduates who specialise in Anaesthesiology and Internal Medicine are given advanced training on the correct clinical use of drugs – also called rational drug use. As an aside, the World Health Organisation defines 'rational drug use' as ensuring 'that patients receive medications appropriate to their clinical needs, in doses that meet their own individual requirements for an adequate period of time, and at the lowest cost to them'.



*Professor Willem du Plooy
and cultivated 'gifbal' plant*

THE WIDE AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF PHARMACOLOGY

Pharmacology and Therapeutics' responsibilities go further, and also include a therapeutic drug monitoring service to the hospital, which includes drugs of abuse.

Clinical Pharmacology, which is the clinical application and monitoring of drug use at a tertiary level, has recently been approved by the SA College of Medicine as a speciality and the department hopes to take in its first candidates in 2010.

Also featured in the department is a Pharmacology Clinic that offers a medical service to DGMH patients and university employees for hypertension, asthma, diabetes and other conditions.

Du Plooy outlines the two-pronged commitment of the department: 'Offering community-focused educational opportunities that enable health professionals to render top quality services; and to increase scientific knowledge. This means our academic staff offer research training and clinical consultation and we participate in laboratory and clinical research projects.' To date 219 peer-reviewed articles have been published.

This then takes Du Plooy to the pride of his department – different research projects that have the potential to be groundbreaking in their various fields.

MEASURING ARTERY ELASTICITY

Professor Elzbieta Osuch, Associate Professor and Principal Medical Officer for the department and DGMH, employs a non-invasive measure to determine the elasticity of the arteries.

Du Plooy elaborates, 'We are, as Mark Twain said, as old as our arteries. When our arteries clog up, we're obviously in line for health problems – one of which is often hypertension. Treatment of hypertension is just treating the symptom, not the cause. But if we can identify and measure the non-elasticity of the arteries, we are better able to treat the problem.'

With an unimpressive-looking transducer using infra-red Doppler plethysmography (a test used to measure changes in blood flow or air volume in different parts of the body) connected to a Powerlab unit, arterial elasticity can be assessed by measuring pulse wave velocity – normally in the aortic-femoral and the brachial-ulna artery segments. 'In layman's terms, the equipment measures the speed that the

pulse travels down an artery: a slow pulse wave indicates good elasticity and a fast one, poor elasticity,' explains Du Plooy.

A poster on this ongoing research was presented by Osuch and Du Plooy at an International Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics conference in Quebec City, Canada, in July 2008. A full article has been submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.

GUINEA PIG TRACHEA AND IRON FILINGS

Asthma medication is an ongoing challenge – for patients and healthcare professionals alike. Professor Ronel Kahler-Venter, Associate Professor in the department, is using a research process that uses isolated guinea pig trachea, which is considered to be a suitable model of human large and central airways. These tracheas are incubated with drugs, stimulants, inhibitors, or any substance to be investigated. The response to the substance is then converted into a signal and translated.

Kahler-Venter also uses a suspension of what can only be described as minute iron filings to isolate very specific white blood cells from others in the blood. These isolated cells are then used in a number of research projects.

Du Plooy adds, 'One of the defence mechanisms or responses to foreign molecules, including pathogens, is by means of the release of hydrogen peroxide from the isolated white blood cells, called neutrophils. The released peroxide then destroys the foreign matter. This reaction yields light that is measured with a luminometer – and again, translated into useful data.'

HERBARIUM OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINES

Another project – one that has also evolved into an information service to the medical profession – is ongoing research into traditional herbal medicines. Du Plooy and his colleagues have done various studies on specific plants. The most recent was on the effect of the 'gifbal' – *Boophone disticha* – a bulbous plant found in grassland and rocky places in South Africa. It's used in traditional medicine as a dressing for wounds, boils, and abscesses to alleviate pain and



Professor Elzbieta Osuch



Professor Ronel Kahler-Venter and her 'iron filings'

THE WIDE AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF PHARMACOLOGY



draw out pus. It's also used as a hot compress in the treatment of oedema.

'But these plants are reported to have caused acute and fatal poisoning in humans, following so-called treatment,' says Du Plooy. He recalls an incident where a young man was treated with this plant and became psychotic. He killed his girlfriend and another man in a jealous rage. In court it transpired that this plant had been given to him to enable him to identify the lover. 'The fact is, our research showed that this plant contains buphanine – an alkaloid that can induce hallucinations, delirium, coma, hypertension, and many other health problems.'

TRANSFORMING WASTE INTO BIO-PRODUCTS

Another development that illustrates the remarkable skills of this research-focused department is an as yet highly confidential project headed by Professor Piet van Wyk, an Associate Professor in the department. Van Wyk and his team are working in a trilateral agreement with India and Brazil on a project that uses organic waste such as paper to develop biological products. The only indication of the significance of this research project that Du Plooy was prepared to share was, 'This is big. Watch this space.'

Suffice it to say that whatever comes out of the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics is likely to be relevant and riveting.



Thabasile Mamabolo, Senior Medical Technical Officer and enthusiastic member of the department's research team

Pasy Tsipa, Principal Medical Technologist in the department

THE RIGHT JOB FOR THE MAN OF MANY TALENTS

HE'S A MAN OF MULTI-FACETED INTERESTS AND HE BELIEVES HE'S IN EXACTLY THE RIGHT JOB FOR THAT CHARACTER TRAIT. He's Professor Willem du Plooy, Head and Professor: Pharmacology and Therapeutics, Medunsa and Dr George Mukhari Hospital (DGMH). 'Pharmacology and its multi-disciplinary research subjects lends itself to someone with wide-ranging interests.'

Du Plooy goes on to describe himself as a jack of all trades – but the rest of the maxim doesn't hold true. He has mastered a healthy number of them.

Du Plooy's ability to master many things is evident first of all in his academic career. He started at the University of Pretoria, where he obtained his BSc (Physiology/Zoology) in 1977 and his MSc in 1983. In 1987 he achieved his PhD (Physiology) at Medunsa. Two years later he was awarded his BSc Hons (Pharm) from the Potchefstroom University. He became a Fellow of the American College of Clinical Pharmacology in 1992.

His career started humbly with the job of Assistant Control Technologist in the Department of Physiology in Medunsa in 1978. He moved up through several stages of lectureships until 1986, when he moved across to Pharmacology and Therapeutics as senior lecturer. He became Associate Professor in 1992, Full Professor in 1995, and Head of Department and Chief Clinical Pharmacologist at DGMH on 1 December 1996.

Du Plooy's career has not been limited the world of academia though, and he has held positions on the SA Pharmacology Society since 1996 and is now President of the SA Society of Basic and Clinical Pharmacology. He is also a council member of the International Union of Basic and Clinical Pharmacology's Division of Pharmacology.

In the midst of this steady progress in his academic and work life, Du Plooy discovered another interest that would become a strong passion of his. Ethics.



Professor Willem du Plooy

Soon after taking up his current position, Du Plooy was sent on a year-long course at the Department of Bioethics at Cape Town University by the Fogarty International Centre's funding programme. 'We were trained how to think about things ethically. It broadens one's perspective on life enormously. It brings respect for other people into every situation. In fact, I believe ethics should be a part of every university course. It is, of course, an absolutely essential part of pharmacology.'

He has continued his interest and studies in ethics over the years and presents an annual workshop on research ethics as well as the medical ethics course to medical students. He was also chair of the Medunsa Research Ethics Committee for five years, and still serves on the committee.

Early childhood development WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?



Professor Lily Cherian (left) and Dr Darlene De Marie, at the University of Limpopo's Child Development Centre at Turfloop

THERE'S A CRISIS BREWING IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE OF EDUCATION IN LIMPOPO. The foundation phase is defined as Grade R to Grade Four. The cause of the crisis is straightforward. Ever since the closure of the Teacher Training Colleges in the post-1994 period, no primary teachers have been trained in the province.

That's a startling fact. For 15 years, in other words, not a single teacher at this most basic level has emerged from the University of Limpopo or any other Limpopo education institution responsible for the training of educators to staff the thousands of primary schools in the province. The result, particularly in a region that remains predominantly rural, could be very serious indeed.

Listen to Professor Lily Cherian, erstwhile director of Turfloop's School of Education, and currently Head of the Department of Educational Psychology.

'The shortage of suitably trained teachers of young children is exacerbated by the Department of Education decision to introduce a compulsory Grade R from next year, 2010. It is our responsibility as a university to provide the facilities and the programmes for the development of future early childhood teachers.'

The seriousness of the situation is reinforced by reports that the national Ministry of Education was considering reopening some teacher training college for the express purpose of training teachers in those areas where the country's university-based faculties and schools of education simply aren't producing enough skilled people to cope with increasing demand. According to erstwhile Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, among the areas most in need of this boost in teacher supply are: primary schools, rural schools, and the general need for more mathematics and language teachers.

Cherian sums up the background to the current situation: 'The quality of any national education system depends on its teachers. In recent years in South Africa, teacher supply has become a matter of

national concern. In 1994, the teacher education landscape was fragmented across a wide variety of institutional sites. While change was obviously necessary – and inevitable after the democratic transition – successive waves of closures, internal restructuring, incorporations and mergers have placed heavy demands on universities – and the University of Limpopo is no exception.'

Cherian made reference to a recent HSRC study that revealed a 30 percent decrease in young women in the 26 to 30 age group enrolling for teacher training in recent years. Inside that statistic, African female enrolment into teacher training courses has steadily declined while white female enrolment has increased. This decline in young African women entering the teaching profession is of particular concern, not least for education in the extensive rural areas in Limpopo.

What has caused the decline of young black women entering the teaching profession? Is it, asks Cherian, because rural communities, previously served by the numerous and strategically placed teacher training colleges, have been left stranded as teacher education recedes to the predominantly urban-based universities? In other words, was the previous propensity to study teaching very sensitive to the impact of distance between home and institution and cost? Or are there just so many more career options that have opened to young black women since 1994? And what about the impact of HIV/Aids, which has had a severely negative effect on young black women in particular?

Aids is certainly a factor to be reckoned with in the country's education system. A large-scale study on educator supply and demand in the South African public school system,³ reported finding an HIV prevalence rate of 12,7 percent among South African teachers.

³ Funded by the South African Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC).

Early childhood development

WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

'Putting this figure in the perspective of the overall relationship between demand and supply,' Cherian says, 'we must observe that in the near future South Africa is likely to face increasing shortages of educators due to resignations, death and age-based retirements. It's depressing to note that the same ELRC study surveyed the health of student teachers in most of the country's higher education institutions and found that over eight percent were HIV positive. Among the students surveyed, females had a much higher HIV prevalence than males. All this indicates the urgent need to increase the production of teachers, particularly to fill those essential functions at the primary and pre-primary levels.'

Before we move on to discuss what is happening at the University of Limpopo to address these challenges, it will be worth examining some of the reasons why so little appears to be happening among the nation's education planners.

Certainly, there's the mooted reopening of some of the old teacher training colleges to increase the output of teachers in certain categories. But at a provincial level, says Cherian, there is a possibility that some of the statistics used for long and medium-term planning are misleading. For example, the total number of primary school learners in Limpopo stands at just under 895 000, and the number of teachers at slightly over 31 000. The average primary school pupil/teacher ratio is therefore calculated at 29:1.

'This indicates a very comfortable picture,' Cherian explains, 'but it's a picture that is very far from reality. Teacher/pupil ratios range between 35 to 40 pupils per teacher in some schools, but in far too many rural schools there are ratios of between 60 and 80 pupils per teacher. Many factors are responsible for this skewed picture, such as the sharply differing conditions between town and country schools, and the existence of hundreds of farm schools with relatively low numbers of learners.'

The implications of the shortage of primary school teachers, not least those specifically trained in early childhood development (ECD), are serious indeed. The raw material for the entire education system is not being given a fair chance to achieve its full potential. And on an individual level, countless thousands of young children – particularly those growing up in a

rural setting – are having their futures circumscribed by misleading statistics, by official indecision, and by the financial and other constraints placed on universities as the trainers of the skilled manpower that is required to rectify the situation.

'If we want to change the predictable course of educational development in South Africa – which is almost certainly today in decline – we have to intervene and invest in the early years,' Cherian asserts. 'School-based interventions at higher grades will not change performance. On the other hand, cognitive performance at an early age (up to six years) can predict later performance. The government has improved access to education for the very young. But there is still concern with quality. Quality education – which can only be delivered by appropriately trained teachers in sufficient numbers – still remains the greatest challenge for education, and development generally, in South Africa.'

Sombre words indeed to accompany a vision of the country's many millions of children who, simply by being alive, demand a decent education. Difficult not to remember the words of a Lionel Richie song from the early 1980s.

'And what about the children / and the generations to come / Will they look back on our history / and curse the things we've done?'⁴

Will future generations curse or bless us? Turn the page to find out about the University of Limpopo's response to the ECD situation, and the difficulties that this response has faced. It's a story of faith – and hope against steep odds. But as Cherian remarks with a slight smile: 'I don't give up all that easily.'

Now for the solution ...

WE NEED THREE BASIC THINGS, BUT WE'VE GOT ONLY TWO

SINCE 2001 PROFESSOR LILLY CHERIAN has been pushing for increased facilities for the training of R Grade teachers. She's a fervent believer in early childhood development (ECD), in the understanding that if real development hasn't taken by six years old, it probably never will. In other words, the foundation

⁵ *Wake up Children*: Thomas McClary and Lionel Richie: 1980

of the country's entire education edifice depends on what happens in the early years. But, as we have seen, a crisis has developed in precisely this area of education, not only in Limpopo but also nationally.

For year's, Turfloop's School of Education has run an Advanced Certificate Course for grade R teacher. This had been partly funded by Unicef, the United Nations Children's Fund. But it was suspended this year (2009) due to lack of suitably qualified lecturers.

'The situation is deteriorating,' Cherian explains. 'Our children are in overcrowded classrooms and the teachers' morale is very low. Did you know that a recent survey by the Joint Education Trust revealed that most grade 4 teachers in the country couldn't pass a subject knowledge maths test. Not surprising, then, that the reading, writing and arithmetic skills of our young children is very low, lower in fact than is being achieved in Kenya, Zambia and Nigeria.'

The result of these realities – one is tempted to call them tragic realities – is that Cherian has become what often sounds like a voice in the wilderness calling for change. And she hasn't only called – she's acted.

As far back as 2003, she began a conversation with ECD experts at the University of Southeast Missouri in the United States. The result of this collaboration was the development of a special Bachelor of Education degree that offered specialist training in ECD and R grade teaching. Cherian's Department of Educational Psychology developed the South Africanised curriculum, and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) accredited the course in September of that year. By 2005, the programme had been approved by the Faculty of Humanities and the full Senate.

That was the first requirement needed to address the situation, a fully accredited academic programme. But that was four years ago now.

The second thing that Cherian did was to transform an existing childcare centre on the Turfloop campus (for staff with young children) into the more academically acceptable University of Limpopo Child Development Centre. She raised R370 000 from the provincial authorities to convert an old house on the campus. She began a collaboration with Dr Darlene De Marie, a Fulbright scholar from the University of South Florida. De Marie came to the University of



Limpopo in 2007, and again earlier this year, to assist Cherian to develop the centre. Cherian told *LIMPOPO LEADER* that De Marie had sewn all the curtains in the centre, which was finally opened in 2008.

'This facility,' Cherian says, 'can become a model for South Africa for quality early childhood programmes. When it was conceptualised, the centre was envisioned as a future laboratory for students to learn the needed skills for ECD and grade R teaching.'

So two of the essential ingredients for making a meaningful response to the primary teacher crisis had been put in place: an accredited ECD course to teach and a laboratory for practice teaching and research. But there are still no students.

Cherian: 'I've had numerous enquiries, not only by young people wanting to do the basic degree, but also by people wanting to do postgraduate research. But the final ingredient in all this is to establish an ECD Teaching Institute, a specialist department within our School. But for that we need money. There's land available, right next to the Child Development Centre. We'd have to build. We'd need to employ at least six suitably qualified teaching staff. And for this final phase we need around R30-million.'

Late in 2008, Cherian heard that the National Department of Education had money available. In record time, she prepared her proposal. It was submitted through the university. But so far there's been no response.

'It's so frustrating sometimes,' she admits. 'You see the tiny children in their school uniforms on the roadsides, and you wonder where it will all end. Let me admit something to you. Very recently I was offered a deanship in a large city-based South African university. But I've turned it down. Why? Because I want to see the ECD Teacher Training Institute established. And I want to see it established HERE – at Turfloop. That's why I say I don't easily take no for an answer.'

Her graceful smile encourages you to believe her.

Medunsa profile

MOJA PUTS OPTIMISM AND OBJECTIVITY TO THE TEST

BEING AN OPTIMIST CAN MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN A HIGHLY DEMANDING JOB; BUT BEING AN OPTIMIST WHO HAS LEARNED TO BE HIGHLY OBJECTIVE IN CRUCIAL SITUATIONS, AND WHO DEMANDS A LOT BOTH FROM HERSELF AND THE PEOPLE AROUND HER – AND YOU HAVE SOMEONE WHO'S LIKELY TO EMBRACE ALL THE CHALLENGES THAT HER DEMANDING NEW POSITION ON THE MEDUNSA CAMPUS SENDS HER WAY.

That's Professor Letticia Moja, appointed in August 2009 as Campus Principal and Deputy VC responsible for academic, research, corporate services and operations activities at Medunsa.

Moja's career has neatly equipped her for the job on several levels – but probably most particularly in the realm of understanding people, practising tolerance and patience, and motivating and bringing out the best in others.

She obtained her MBChB from the University of Natal in 1982. Both her parents died and she chose to return to her home in Ga-Rankuwa to look after her younger siblings. That move saw her continuing her medical studies at Medunsa, where she specialised and obtained her MMED in Obstetrics & Gynaecology in 1990. From

1991 to 2002 Moja worked at Medunsa, in the Gynaecologic Oncology Unit – as a Specialist, then as a Lecturer, and then as Head of the unit.

During this period she had the opportunity to continue her studies through SA Medical Association, and she attended an advanced management programme for health professionals at the Foundation for Professional Development at Manchester Business School, Britain, in 1999.

March 2002 saw Moja moving on – this time to the University of Free State (UFS), where she worked as Vice-Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences until December 2003, when she took over as Dean of the Faculty. At the same time, Moja obtained her Master in Business Administration in 2006, and completed a Short Programme Assessment of Learning in Higher Education as well as a risk management course in 2007. How did she achieve so much studying while successfully running the Health Sciences Faculty? 'It's not hard. You just make time for everything,' she states.

Her time at UFS was an enriching period. 'The university had its own dynamics; historically it was Afrikaans and struggling with transformation. I was a minority of the minorities. I was black and a woman. And I

learned a lot. I learned how to work effectively with people of completely different backgrounds. I learned how to be objective in the face of accusations about victimisation. I learned that compromising the truth is never an option; and I learned the importance of encouraging youngsters to take responsibility for their own growth and progress – and not to allow external circumstances to determine their success.

'Responses were not always positive, but ultimately the students got to understand that essentially I had their interests at heart. The important thing was to keep my focus on the longer-term and not just on quick-fix, short-term solutions.'

This takes her to her plans for Medunsa. This institution too, has its own set of challenges, she acknowledges. The merger dealt a blow to the external image of the university, which naturally impacted the internal image and morale. Then even though the announcement was clearly made a year ago that there would be no relocation of the campus to Polokwane, Moja says that message doesn't seem to have hit home. The anxiety still seems to simmer just below the surface.

'It's time to change that. We need to gain back the confidence of our staff and the students. We

need to regain the strength that this campus had in years gone by. The fact is that we need to focus on where we are here and now. The decision to demerge is not ours to make; but the students are with us now, and it's our mandate to give them the best possible education we can regardless of the organisational intricacies taking place around us.

'We have a huge responsibility to our students; we can't call them back at another time when we believe circumstances are more suitable for producing graduates. We must work together to do our best for each and every one of them. That's our core business.'

'We can debate how best to train them; but we cannot debate or argue about issues that are out of our realm of responsibility. That means we are failing in our mandate.'

Moja believes that Medunsa's recent period of 'part-time leadership' by people who had other big responsibilities, dissipated the institution's focus on striving to achieve its main objectives. But that the appointments this year of both Professor Errol Holland and herself into top management positions will see progress being made.

'Medunsa has strengths and we need to focus on them. We have a strong training ground for a wide range of healthcare



Professor Letticia Moja

professionals – doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists, and physiotherapists. We must properly empower them to enable them all to take their rightful places within the South African healthcare environment.'

What's Moja's message to Medunsa in these early days of her new post? 'Medunsa has the potential to be a leading health science training facility. But we need to rebuild it together. There

are too many instances where the response is that "management must take care of that". But we need to understand that we're all leaders in our own areas. We must all take responsibility for our own units and be efficient and effective where we are. Every person has a vital role to play here – and we need to show the outside world that this is a great place to study at, to work for, and to invest in.'

Profile: Thokwane 'TP' Moloto

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN BENONI – AND THE HAGUE

THE STORY OF THOKWANE MOLOTO CONTAINS SEVERAL STRIKING ANOMALIES. Take the first one. To visit this internationally recognised human rights and criminal lawyer, you need to drive to Benoni and park your car in Harpur Street, not far from the Magistrate's Court. Moloto can be found on the second floor of an untidy building called the Southvaal Centre. Vendors sell fruit on the littered pavements; traffic grinds past; the gutters are choked; dust and sand from nearby mining operations wait to be raised by the slightest breeze. It seemed a long way to Europe, more specifically to The Hague and the International Criminal Court situated in that famous Dutch city.

We'll return to these contrasts in due course. Before we do, however, let's look at the other anomaly. It's to be found in Moloto's history. His birthplace in 1949 was an unremarkable village called Jibeng. That's near Burgersfort in Sekhukhuneland in what is now in the southern reaches of Limpopo province. Like the streets of Benoni, his native village had been filled with dust – and for the same reason. The Atok platinum mine is close by, as is a new chrome mine. The anomaly is simply that in this unpromising ground – isolated, marginalised, socially under-resourced – so talented and useful a life was to take root and grow.

By the end of standard four, Moloto had run out of local schooling possibilities. But he had already shown such promise that his parents (his father was headman of Jibeng) saw to it that he was able to attend several schools in other villages which brought him to junior certificate level by the time he was 20. He matriculated two years later from the Boaparankwe Royal College near Marble Hall, a school specially established for the sons of traditional leaders.

'I didn't go directly to university,' Moloto recalled, 'but found myself a job as a clerk in the Bantu Affairs office in Germiston. I was the young man from the country coming to town to earn my living. I learned a lot. I stayed for four years.'

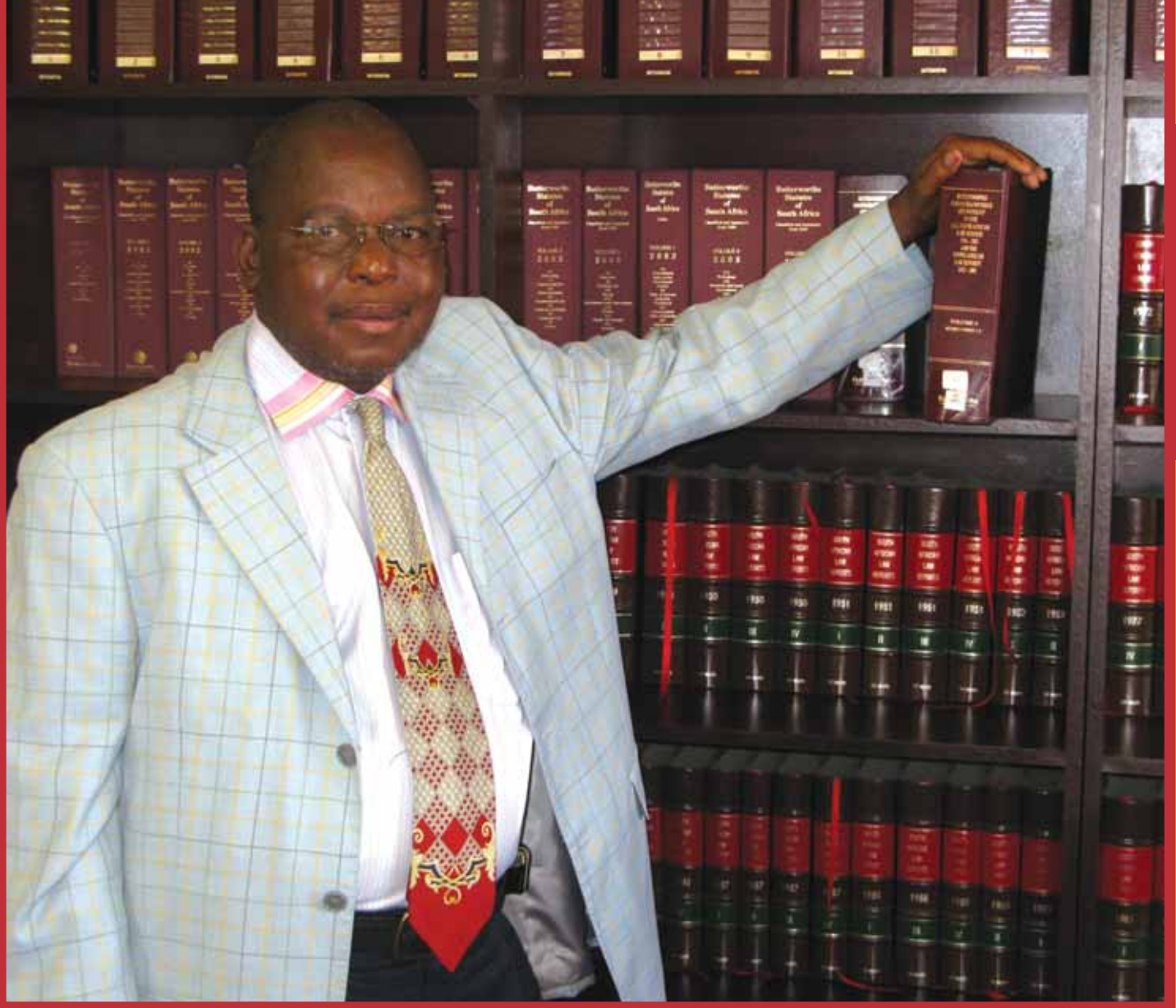
Only then, in 1976, did he go to the University of the North, enrolling for the four-year B.Proc degree, which he was awarded in 1979. The following year he enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand to do his LLB degree part time, an accomplishment which he achieved in a single year. After serving his articles with law firms in Carletonville and Springs, he passed his Board examinations and was admitted to the courts as an attorney in 1983.

Almost immediately – actually in February 1984 – he started his own law firm. He was now 33 years old. TP Moloto & Company specialised in family, commercial and criminal law. In fact, it still does, after 25 years of continuous operation.

'After the establishment of democracy in 1994, I started to take an interest in human rights,' he said. 'I did an LLM (Masters of Laws) specialising in human rights in 1996. At roughly the same time, I went to Lund University in Sweden and did a special six-month certificate programme in human rights. A few years later, my involvement with the International Criminal Court at The Hague began. I was fascinated with the sort of cases that the Court dealt with: state aggression, war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. In 2002 I registered at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth for a postgraduate diploma in international criminal justice. By early 2006 I was ready. I applied for admission to the International Criminal Court as a List Counsel. I was accepted. This meant that I began to be called upon to do duty there.'

Moloto is the first, and remains the only, South African to be in this position. In 2008 he was elected to the executive council of the International Criminal Bar, an association of counsellors authorised to appear in the International Criminal Court and other international forums.

In response to a question from *LIMPOPO LEADER*, Moloto said that the idea of justice in modern states could only be understood in the context



Thokwane Moloto

of the strict separation of powers between the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive (or Cabinet). 'There is absolutely no room for any fusion between these powers,' he declared. 'The separation forms the basis of the rule of law.'

Moloto referred to the seminal work on this subject by the 18th century French political philosopher, Charles-Louis Montesquieu, whose enunciation of the *trias politica* (roughly translated as the three political components) set the standard that still exists today.

'Respect for the rule of law was supposed to be a precondition for membership of the United Nations,' Moloto said, 'but that's not always the case. Some countries have no constitutions. In that case, parliamentary power should uphold the rule of law. Often, however, parliamentary supremacy is usurped by presidential power, and invariably the judiciary finds its supremacy undermined. These realities spill over and try to influence the workings of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Not all countries are members of the Court. The United States, Russia

and Zimbabwe are notable abstainers. Yet sometimes they want the ICC to countenance *Animal Farm*⁵ type politics to serve their own political and strategic ends.'

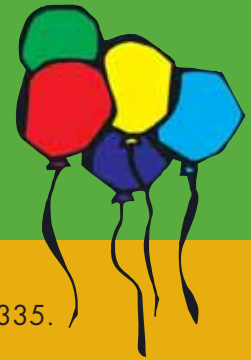
Speaking specifically of Africa, Moloto said that it seemed impossible to talk about justice and the rule of law without first talking about political stability. 'These two things go together like the chicken and the egg,' he declared. 'But in Africa, all too often, the more development that occurs the more the erosion of justice takes place. The problem is that development means money, and money frequently means corruption. But can you have political stability without development?'

It was time to go. It seemed strangely comforting to take an inkling of Moloto's experience and wisdom, this barefoot boy from Jibeng, into the growling Benoni streets. The mining dust and sand seemed more manageable now that the anomalies had been more firmly grasped.

⁵ George Orwell's satirical novel describing the slide of farmyard animals towards dictatorship by the pigs, first published in 1945, and made famous by such sayings as 'All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others'.

Here's the reader survey

YOUR OPINIONS WILL HELP TO SHAPE THE UNIVERSITY'S FLAGSHIP PUBLICATION



PART OF THE WAY IN WHICH *LIMPOPO LEADER* IS CELEBRATING THE START OF ITS SECOND FIVE YEARS IS TO MAKE CLOSER CONTACT WITH ITS READERS. We are anxious to hear from you so that we may serve you, our readers, better.

The attached reader survey is easily detachable and even easier to fill out. It'll take no more than five minutes of your time, and there's no need to identify yourself. Then simply fold the survey as instructed, stick it down, and drop it in the post. There are on-line ways of responding as well. Go to the university's website – www.ul.ac.za – or the production team's website – www.dgrwriting.co.za – where you'll find the survey questionnaire. When you've filled it in simply send directly to the editor of *LIMPOPO LEADER* at dgrwrite@iafrica.com or print it out and fax to

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We're waiting to hear from you.

A note on timing: We'll be obliged to stop receiving survey forms at the end of January 2010, when *LIMPOPO LEADER 20* is scheduled to go to print. That gives you the whole of the summer holidays to help the university's flagship publication to be more responsive to its readers.

To return to the matter of personal identification, if you don't happen to be on our mailing list, and you'd like to be, then we'd love to have your details. Use the space provided on the survey form – or you can use the form on the inside back page (opposite the page you're reading now) of your current copy of *LIMPOPO LEADER*.

Here's the complete set to jog your memory.



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Please help us update our ALUMNI database with current contact information, so that we can continue to be in touch with all University of Limpopo alumni.

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Surname:
Date of birth: (yyyy/mm/dd)
Address:
Postal Code:
Tel: (H)
Tel: (W)
Cell:
Email:
When were you at UL? (e.g. 1993 – 1970)
Degree(s) obtained:
When was/were your degree(s) obtained:
Degree(s) obtained at other institutions (Please specify):
.....
Occupation:
Special achievements /honours:

Please return the completed questionnaire to Clare-Rose Julius:

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