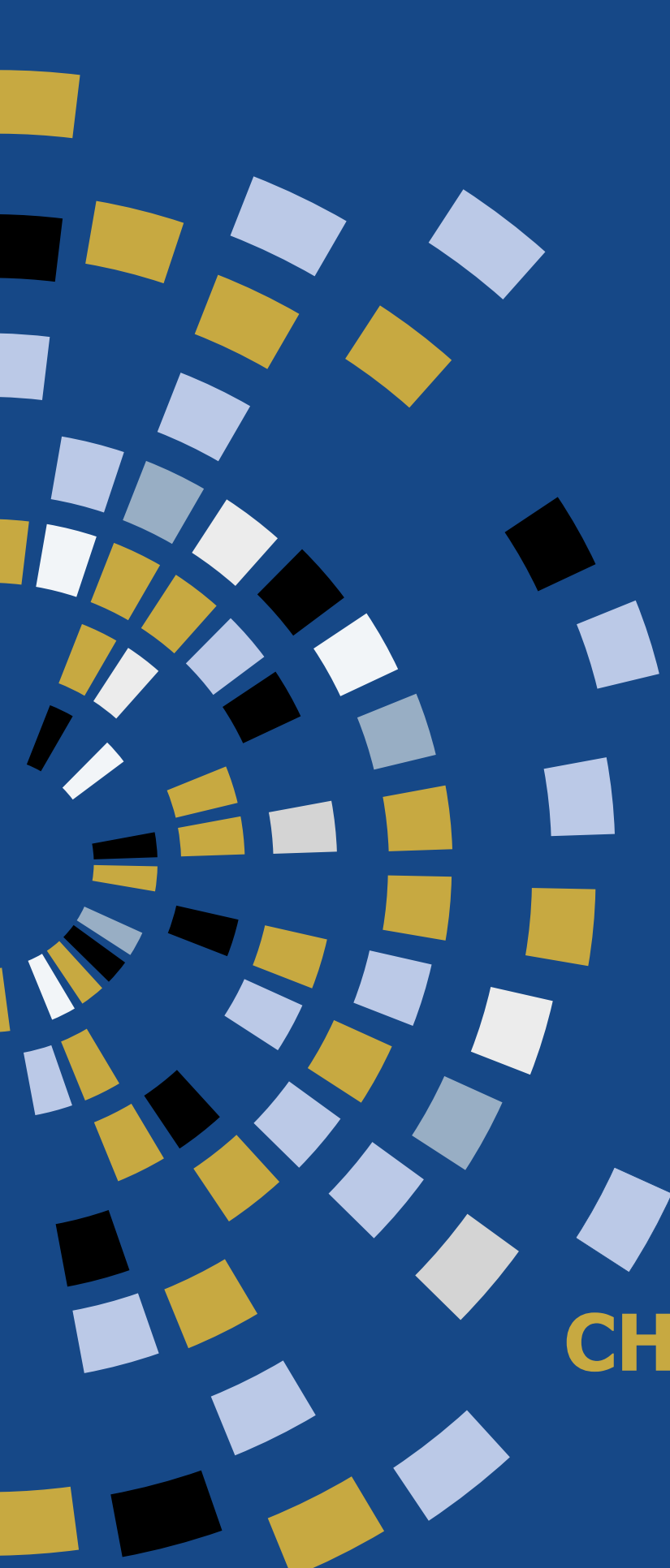




VICE- CHANCELLOR'S EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

VALUES

Accountability

UL is answerable to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders

Transparency

UL promotes openness, debate, discussion and consultations

Integrity

UL promotes honesty, duty of care, respect and fairness

Academic Freedom

UL protects the right to adopt innovative teaching and research

Excellence and Professionalism

UL adheres to excellence, norms and standards of teaching and learning and that of professional bodies

MOTTO

Finding Solutions for Africa

VISION:

To be a leading African University focused on the developmental needs of its communities and epitomising academic excellence and innovativeness

MISSION:

- We provide **excellent and relevant academic programmes, research and community engagement** initiatives that respond to the developmental needs of communities whilst producing well-rounded graduates who give back to their communities and are global citizens;
- We **enhance access to higher education** for under-prepared, socially and economically disadvantaged students in particular;
- We **provide academic support services** to all students of the University to ensure success in their studies;
- We **provide planned opportunities for the development of all staff**, particularly the academic staff in respect of their teaching, research and community engagement skills;
- We strive to **strengthen and maintain partnerships and collaboration** with the government and private sector, local authorities, international institutions and our alumni community; and
- We endeavour **to diversify the University's funding streams significantly**, particularly the increase of third stream income, in order to support the launching of new teaching and learning, research and community engagement activities and sustain the existing ones.

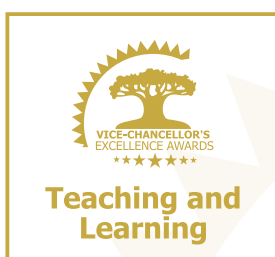
VALUES:

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Integrity
- Academic Freedom
- Excellence and Professionalism





Awards Categories



Special Thanks to the 2026 VC Awards Local Organising Committee Members

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- Eddie Chewe
- Kholofelo Sekoala
- Lucrezia Bhimjee
- Marelize Kellermann
- Maria Moja
- Mosela Selepe
- Moses Moreroa
- Newman Wadesango
- Noko Monene
- Owence Chabaya
- Reuben Maake
- Thabo Madisha
- Thembinkosi Mabila
- Macdonald Motlane
- Pumia Ubisi
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VICE-CHANCELLOR'S FOREWORD

TEACHING AND LEARNING, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH

It is my great pleasure to present this year's Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards, through which we recognise and celebrate excellence and the achievements of our academic staff in the areas of teaching, research and community engagement.

The University of Limpopo remains committed to academic distinction, high-impact research and community-centred development and innovation. The Vice-Chancellor's Awards are a joint initiative of the Offices of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Partnerships.

The University of Limpopo is firmly on a sustainable growth and development path in teaching and learning, research and community engagement. These awards honour colleagues who have excelled in these three pillars of our mandate. They recognise individuals whose dedication, innovation and commitment to excellence continue to advance the University's academic, research and community engagement work in service of society. Through these awards, we also emphasise the importance of science, innovation and research in the development agenda of our society.



Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele

Vice-Chancellor and Principal

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EXCELLENCE AWARDS



The work of this year's awardees underscores the following, amongst others:

- 1) The scientific knowledge that has been generated has set a new bar for knowledge generation at this University. Some of the research outputs produced have placed public appreciation of science, and of the knowledge project more broadly, at the centre of efforts to solve the intractable problems facing our society. In the scientific community, and amongst funding agencies, there is an emerging discourse and expectation that science should be socially impactful, advancing the socio-economic development of our nation. It is pleasing to
- 2) A number of this year's awardees are no strangers to this recognition. Their continued success is also a recognition of their ability to develop and mentor their students and colleagues, and to work with collaborators across the world. This reaffirms the correctness of a view that excellence is not achieved easily or rapidly. It often requires a lifetime of investment and of focus on doing the very best that one can.
- 3) It is also pleasing and heart-warming to note that we are also

recognising academics as teachers. These colleagues are recognised for excelling as teachers at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and are honoured for their exceptional performance, measured in terms of their students' academic achievement.

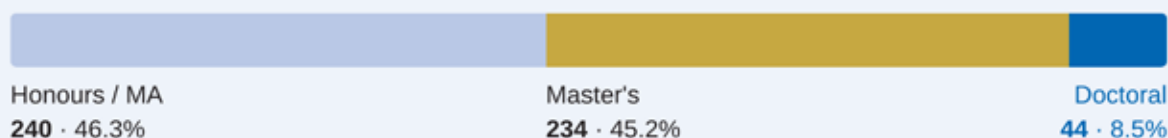
Each award presented in this edition is a testament to discipline, resilience and an unyielding pursuit of excellence. Our steady growth is expressed in the numbers below, which tell nothing but a compelling story of the growth and resilience of our institution.



Our Teaching and Learning results are written on the faces of our graduates

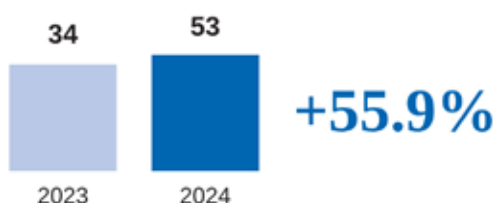
FIGURE 1 · POSTGRADUATE OUTPUT

518 postgraduate graduates in 2025



Doctoral share 8.5% against a 15–20% benchmark for research-intensive universities.

Doctoral graduates, 2023 → 2024



Growth in postgraduate completions, 2023 → 2024

University of Limpopo · **21.6%**

National average · 4–6%

≈ 4× the national rate

Growing the next generation of scholars. Doctoral output rose by more than half in a year, and postgraduate completions grew roughly four times faster than the national average.

Our growing Research impact

FIGURE 2 · RESEARCH OUTPUT AND IMPACT, 2023–2025

1,195

Web of Science-indexed publications

7,403

total citations

6.19

citations per publication

31

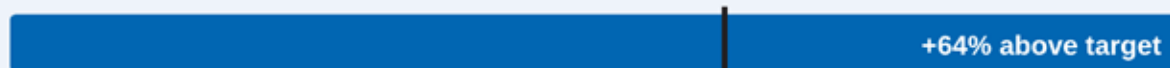
h-index over three years

Of 7,403 citations, **6,914** come from other researchers; only **489 (6.6%)** are self-citations

Cited by the world, not by ourselves. A self-citation rate of 6.6% means more than nine in every ten citations come from scholars elsewhere.

FIGURE 3 · NRF-RATED RESEARCHERS

74 rated researchers against a 2025 target of 45



By gender



By race



Race and gender together



By faculty



Bars to scale (Science and Agriculture = 42). Men / women: 28 / 14 · 10 / 5 · 4 / 6 · 7 / 0.

16

new or re-evaluated ratings in 2025

Y1

a rare rating, held by Dr Peace Mkhonto

* Black includes Coloured, Indian and other designated groups. Percentages are of all 74 rated researchers.

Target exceeded by 64%. $(74 - 45) \div 45$. Nine in ten rated researchers are Black and one in three is a woman. Science and Agriculture holds 57% of all ratings, and Health Sciences is the only faculty where women are the majority (6 of 10).



FIGURE 4 · RESEARCH FUNDING SECURED IN 2025

R59.87m across 53 grants



Non-NRF sources (all except grey): R47.65m · 79.6% of the total

■ ARC (two research chairs)	R30.00m	50.1%
■ NRF (40 grants)	R12.22m	20.4%
■ UCT Lung Institute	R6.28m	10.5%
■ University College Dublin	R3.66m	6.1%
□ Other funders	R7.71m	12.9%

A diversified funding base. Half the year's research income came from the ARC alone, and four of every five rand came from beyond the NRF.

FIGURE 5 · RESEARCH CHAIRS



+50%

growth in chairs, 8 → 12

4 → 10

SARCHI chairs, six of them new

3 of 12

chairs led by women (25%)

From hydrogen to heritage. The six new SARCHI chairs span wireless networks, energy materials, agroecosystems, non-communicable diseases, development studies and liberation heritage.

Our scholars publish in the world's leading journals. Professor Tholene Sodi co-authored a paper in *Nature Medicine* and was appointed to a WHO/UNICEF expert panel. Professor Kwena Modibane published in *Coordination Chemistry Reviews* and filed a provisional patent. Professor Wilmien Luus-Powell was invited to contribute to the IUCN Red List assessments. Behind it all, our ethics committees maintained full compliance with national frameworks and full alignment with the SANS 10386 animal care standard.

FIGURE 6 · PARTNERSHIPS AND GLOBAL REACH

58

national research
partnerships

11+

international partnerships
across 4 continents

45

international conference
appearances in 20+
countries on 6 continents

10 of 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals



6 of 7 Agenda 2063 aspirations



Active in **SASUF**, a network of 109 funded projects, 75% of them involving historically disadvantaged institutions, and in **SANORD**.

I take particular pride in the rise of our women scholars in 2026. To mention but a few, Professor Tebogo Mothiba was named overall winner of the Distinguished Woman Researcher award at the South African Women in Science Awards. Ms Victoria Hloko received a SAWISA fellowship. Dr Tukiso Sewapa was named SADC joint winner of the SARIMA Early Career Excellence in Research Management award. In the DIMAMO community, Professor Livhuwani Muthelo's AMEN project, run with University College Dublin, has already delivered a borehole that grows food for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. Here is research that reaches the dinner table.

FIGURE 7 · WOMEN LEADING RESEARCH

Women among NRF-rated researchers: 29% baseline → 33.8% now (25 of 74) → target 40% by 2028

33.8%

Baseline 29% 2028 target: 40%

R18m

AMEN maternal nutrition
project, with University
College Dublin

R90,000

DSTI SAWISA fellowship
awarded in 2026

3

national and regional
awards for UL women in
2026

Deliberate investment, measurable results. The share of rated women has risen 4.8 points from the 29% baseline. At today's size, about five more rated women (30 of 74) would reach the 40% target.



These recognitions are no accident. They are the fruit of deliberate investment in mentorship, rating preparation and research capacity for women scholars, and women now hold a third of all NRF ratings at the university (Figures 3 and 7). And yet, this is no time for complacency. Our doctoral share still sits below the benchmark for research-intensive institutions (Figure 1), and our journey from "Trusted Operator" to "Innovator" is under way but not complete. Meanwhile, higher education is entering a period of profound disruption. Artificial intelligence is already changing how we teach, how students learn, and how knowledge is created, validated and shared. The ground is moving, and institutions that stand still will be left behind.

I am reminded of the EY-Parthenon study, *Are universities of the past still the future?*, and I urge every member of our university community to read it. The mainstay of its argument is as clear as it is uncomfortable: the Higher Education sector requires a

fundamental rethink as student needs shift and new digital ecosystems for learning and knowledge creation take shape. It calls on universities to think "future-back", to picture where they must stand a decade from now and let that picture discipline the decisions they make today.

FIVE "WHAT IF?" QUESTIONS · EY-PARTHENON

1. What if the cost of learning were driven down to zero?
2. What if learning journeys were entirely flexible and customisable?
3. What if universities were held accountable for results?
4. What if commercialised research could pay for itself?
5. What if technology could solve the global supply-demand mismatch in skills?

None of these questions has an easy answer, and all of them demand our attention. They ask us to rethink not only what we teach and research, but how our systems and processes work and what outcomes we are ultimately accountable for. A university capable

of producing this year's recipients is more than equal to that task.

I leave you with one word: **Excelsior**, ever higher. It is not a destination but a disposition, a refusal to confuse arrival with achievement. It is the spirit of every person honoured in these pages, and it must become the spirit of the institution as a whole.

My sincere thanks go to the adjudication committees, the organising team, our Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Executive Deans and Directors, and the families whose sacrifices stand quietly behind every achievement we recognise. To each recipient: *congratulations!* You have honoured your beloved university, you have honoured your discipline, and you have honoured your nation; you have honoured yourselves. To reciprocate, your university now honours you. May these awards be remembered not as the peak of your journey, but as proof of how much higher you can still climb.

**VICE-CHANCELLOR'S
EXCELLENCE AWARDS**



RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Prof Marlise van Staden

Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor:
Research, Innovation and Partnerships



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S
EXCELLENCE AWARDS



The Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards ceremony is an important and much-anticipated event at the University. This is a time for celebrating excellence in all three core areas of the academic project. This annual event is a highlight for us because it allows us to appreciate the brilliant efforts of our scientists and researchers

Our researchers always amaze us with their resilience and innovation. This year, once again, they have excelled in various areas of research. They have attracted research funding in an era when such funding is exceedingly difficult to secure. Very importantly, they are carving out new research niches and focusing on both African and other international partnerships. Furthermore, researchers and lecturers increasingly integrate community engagement into their research projects and curricula, thereby seeking to solve the challenges facing the communities around us.

I wish to congratulate all the nominees for this year's awards. You have truly shown that you have what it takes to shine in research. Over a three-year period, the nominees' diligent efforts have produced impactful research that is already improving, and will continue to improve, the lives of the communities we serve, as well as those of communities in other countries. As a University, we are proud to acknowledge this excellence. At this event, we are also afforded the opportunity to honour NRF-rated researchers who have received a new rating or whose rating has been renewed.

Congratulations to the recipients of research awards at the institutional level: Best Overall Established Researcher; Best Overall Upcoming Researcher; Best Female Researcher; and the researcher who generated the most income at the University. Researchers who meet the stringent criteria but do not win at institutional level are recognised as winners at School level. To all the winners: congratulations on your achievements and recognition as researchers of stature. As the University of Limpopo, we salute you!

We also honour our scholars involved in Community Engagement with the following three prestigious awards: Best Overall Established Community Engagement Scholar in the University, Best Overall Upcoming/Emerging Community Engagement Scholar in the University, and Best Female Community Engagement Scholar in the University. Congratulations to all our community engagement scholars who advance this pillar of the University by engaging our communities at the level where it matters most.

This year, it is my privilege to honour

our Vice-Chancellor & Principal, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, who is presiding over these awards for the first time. Throughout this year, his support of research, teaching, and community engagement has enabled staff to excel.

We honour him for his dedication to research and academia, and we know that under his leadership this University will become a more research-intensive institution without compromising on teaching, learning, and assessment. We also know that by increasingly integrating community engagement into curricula and research projects, we will continue to excel in doing impactful research and in teaching students to become socially responsive and responsible citizens. In doing this, the staff at the University of Limpopo will be providing solutions for the challenges facing Limpopo, South Africa, and Africa.

“Our researchers always amaze us with their resilience and innovation”



TEACHING AND LEARNING

Prof Richard Madadzhe

Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning



The Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards ceremony is an important and much-anticipated event at the University. This is a time for celebrating excellence in all three core areas of the academic project. This annual event is a highlight for us because it allows us to appreciate the brilliant efforts of our scientists and researchers

It should be underscored that sharing expertise, skills and knowledge from one generation to the next is indispensable for sustaining meaningful and productive human existence on this 'blue planet'. While in the past this was done by elders (who were known as walking encyclopaedias) seated around the fire with the youth, nowadays the role is performed by professionals (academics). Against this backdrop, it is heartening to observe that the university regards teaching and learning as essential to the country's future and its own. It therefore comes as no surprise that the University ensures that its teaching and learning activities are of the highest standard humanly possible.

It is an understatement to proclaim that we live in an extremely demanding environment. One of the demands across the board is the acquisition of quality education; quality education produces quality graduates; and quality graduates have a competitive edge in the job market. How do we produce quality graduates? While the question might seem rhetorical, in my view, the answer is simple: quality teaching and learning produce quality graduates for a better society.

To buttress the aforementioned foundational necessity, the University employs suitably qualified academics such as those we are honouring today.

Among other things, these academics unwaveringly:

- appreciate and respond to students' individual needs
- have a genuine passion for their profession and continuous professional development
- possess deep knowledge of the subject and thus make lectures apt, engaging and fascinating
- are adaptable and creative as they seamlessly integrate technology (for example, blended teaching and learning, and artificial intelligence) into their lectures to accommodate the changing socio-economic needs of the country, in particular, and the world at large
- motivate students to reach their potential and instil a love of lifelong learning, which ultimately propels the country to be on par with, if not ahead of, other countries in educational, economic, social and political matters
- exhibit empathy for their students. They rejoice when students attain success in their studies, and they are deeply hurt when students fail their modules.

like to see every student reach their full academic potential.

We know that teaching as a profession often appears to be a thankless, exasperating and wearisome activity. Yet your role is incomparable, because no one is better placed to raise a cadre of graduates who will prepare the ground for a better society for all humanity. Thus, we thank you for going above and beyond in your teaching and learning approaches. It is no exaggeration to say that your innovative ways of engaging students and igniting their passion for learning are unparalleled.

Above all, good teachers epitomise Thomas Edison's maxim: "There is no substitute for hard work." In other words, these teachers deeply appreciate that "without hard work, nothing grows but weeds" (Gordon B. Hinckley). The University sincerely congratulates you on your well-deserved Best Teacher Awards! We are all proud of your achievements. You have truly earned every bit of these awards because you embody the conviction that this country will hardly achieve any worthwhile outcome without a cohort of well-educated citizenry. The University knows that your impact as teachers will never be expunged. May these awards propel you to greater heights in academia!

“Quality teaching and learning produce quality graduates for a better society”

Furthermore, you have been nominated for teaching and learning awards because you undeniably deserve them. The University appreciates and recognises your stupendous teaching and learning practices and unwavering commitment to student success. News of students failing their modules tears your hearts to pieces. You feel this way because you would



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S
EXCELLENCE AWARDS



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S
EXCELLENCE AWARDS



Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards in Teaching and Learning



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S
EXCELLENCE AWARDS



TEACHING AND LEARNING EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026

– CELEBRATING
OUTSTANDING
TEACHERS



Prof Owence Chabaya

Acting Director: Centre for Academic Excellence

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S
EXCELLENCE AWARDS



The University of Limpopo's Teaching and Learning Excellence Awards honour academic staff whose dedication and teaching methods help students understand their subjects, develop skills and succeed in their studies



The awards aim to promote effective teaching, encourage innovation and provide an opportunity for academics to share good practices. By improving how they teach, lecturers can contribute to a better learning experience and strengthen the quality of education across the university.

The awards are presented in two categories: the Up-and-Coming

Teacher Award, for lecturers with less than 10 years of teaching experience, and the Established Teacher Award, for lecturers with more than 10 years of experience who have demonstrated sustained excellence and contributed to teaching and learning.

In 2026, three academics received awards in the Up-and-Coming Teacher category and four in the

Established Teacher category. The winners represent all four faculties at the university.

The awards encourage a culture in which teaching is valued, good practices are shared and students benefit from effective, student-centred education.



BUILDING CONFIDENT DIETITIANS THROUGH PRACTICAL TEACHING

Best Up-coming Teacher at School Level

School of Health Care Sciences
Faculty of Health Sciences

Glenrose Manale



For Glenrose Manale, nutrition education goes beyond teaching students what people should eat. She believes it is also about equipping future dietitians with the knowledge, practical skills and confidence they need to make sound decisions and support the health of others

At the University of Limpopo, Manale is a Junior Lecturer in the Department of Human Nutrition and Dietetics.

Her academic career began as a part-time lecturer at the University of Limpopo in 2016. She later worked as a Junior Lecturer and Assistant Lecturer at the University of Cape Town and Nelson Mandela University before returning to UL in 2022 as a Junior Lecturer.

Manale believes students learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process and can connect what they learn to real-life situations. Her teaching includes clinical placements, case-based learning and dietary counselling, allowing students to apply their knowledge, think critically and learn from practical experiences. She also provides timely feedback to help students identify areas for improvement and build confidence.



"Teaching is more than passing on knowledge. It is about helping students discover their strengths, build confidence and realise what they are capable of," she says.

What motivates her most is seeing students overcome self-doubt and develop into capable professionals.

She is particularly encouraged when former students qualify as registered dietitians and use their knowledge and skills to care for patients and contribute to their communities.

Manale serves as Chairperson of the Student Support Committee, contributing to initiatives that support student success and wellbeing. In 2024, an undergraduate research team she supervised won the Best Student in Undergraduate Dietetics Research Award. In 2025, an undergraduate research group she supervised produced a peer-reviewed publication.

For Manale, teaching is ultimately about seeing the impact of her work through the success of her students and the contribution they make to patients and communities as qualified dietitians.

BUILDING STUDENT CONFIDENCE THROUGH INCLUSIVE TEACHING

Best Up-coming Teacher at School Level

School of Languages and Communication Studies
Faculty of Humanities

Prof Edward Montle



Professor Edward Montle is an Associate Professor and English Studies Programme Coordinator in the Department of Languages at the University of Limpopo. His teaching career is shaped by a belief that students need both academic support and encouragement to reach their potential

His teaching philosophy is guided by social constructivism, inclusive education and a humanistic approach. He believes every student should have the opportunity and support to succeed. His classes encourage students to build knowledge together, question ideas and learn from one another. He uses collaborative discussions, peer learning and multilingual engagement, as well as audio texts, film adaptations and digital

resources to make learning accessible to students with different needs and backgrounds. "Every student deserves the opportunity, support and encouragement to succeed." Prof Montle began his education career as a Mentor and Senior Mentor at the Centre for Academic Excellence. He later joined TEACH South Africa as a Teach SA Ambassador at Mphage Secondary School, where he taught English First Additional Language and Life Orientation before becoming a university lecturer.



"Seeing a hesitant student begin to participate confidently, or a struggling student regain belief in their abilities, reminds me why I chose this profession"

What motivates him most is seeing students grow. He is particularly encouraged when a hesitant

student gains confidence or when a student who has struggled begins to believe in their abilities.

His contribution to teaching and learning extends beyond his classroom. He serves as a School Academic Development Practitioner at the Centre for Academic Excellence and has participated in national and international teaching and learning projects.

Prof Montle has received the Sunday World Unsung Heroes Award in the Youth in Education and Academia category and was elected to the South African Young Academy of Science. Internationally, the International Teachers Association recognised his contribution to developing its AI in Education course.



PUTTING CARE AT THE CENTRE OF TEACHING

Best Up-coming Teacher at School Level

School of Education
Faculty of Humanities

Dr Edward Thikhathali



Teaching is about more than helping students pass their modules. It is about understanding their challenges, supporting their progress and giving them the confidence to succeed, this is according to Dr Edward Thikhathali

He joined the University of Limpopo on 1 March 2024 as a lecturer in the Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, where he teaches Academic and Computer Literacy to first-year Bachelor of Education students. His teaching philosophy is guided by the principle of care, which is central to the School of Education's conceptual framework. He believes that students learn better when their individual circumstances are understood and the barriers affecting their studies are addressed.

"Care means understanding students as individuals, recognising the challenges they face and creating an environment in which they can participate, persevere and succeed," he explains. To put this into practice, Dr Thikhathali uses attendance registers, marksheets and assessment submissions to identify students who may be struggling. Rather than viewing these records as administrative requirements, he uses them to identify problems early, engage students and provide support where needed.

"When students who once needed support become a source of encouragement to others, it reminds me why I chose this profession. Their progress shows that teaching can change lives well beyond the classroom,"

His commitment to teaching also extends to research. By studying student engagement, digital learning, inclusion and academic performance in his own modules, he continuously looks for ways to improve the learning experience. This approach has made a difference, particularly for students supported by the Reakgona Disability Centre (RDC).

Through academic guidance, collaboration with the centre and individual support, students who were at risk of deregistration have been able to re-engage with their studies and progress successfully.

His approach reflects a commitment to ensuring that every student has an opportunity to learn, grow and reach their potential.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE WORLD OF WORK

Best Established Teacher at School Level

School of Economics and Management
Faculty of Management and Law



Prof Kwazi Majola

Drawing on nearly two decades of experience in the public and private sectors, Professor Kwazi Majola says this experience helps him prepare students for the realities of the workplace

His teaching and research focus on human resource management, employment relations, inclusion and diversity, with particular interest in the rights of persons with disabilities, cultural diversity and gender representation. Prof Majola's teaching philosophy is shaped by the belief that education should connect academic knowledge with real workplace experiences. Having worked in different professional fields before joining academia in 2011, he brings practical insight into the classroom, helping students understand how employment policies, labour relations and

management decisions affect organisations and employees. For him, teaching is also about creating an inclusive learning environment where students can question ideas, share experiences and develop the confidence to apply what they learn.

“What matters to me is helping students understand the world beyond the classroom and preparing them to make a meaningful contribution wherever they work.”

His commitment to inclusion extends beyond the classroom. He has organised seminars on disability and employment, women in management, and the role of trade unions in improving working conditions and employee productivity. These engagements encourage meaningful discussions about workplace challenges and the need for fair and inclusive

employment practices.

Prof Majola also takes pride in developing future academics. At the University of Limpopo, he serves as Departmental Research Coordinator and chairs the Postgraduate Selection Committee. He has supervised postgraduate students to completion and mentors colleagues pursuing doctoral qualifications. For Majola, the greatest reward of teaching is seeing students grow into knowledgeable, confident professionals who can address workplace challenges, promote fairness and contribute to society.

Prof Majola says that the greatest reward of teaching is seeing students grow into knowledgeable, confident professionals who can address workplace challenges, promote fairness and contribute to society.



MAKING MATHEMATICS MEANINGFUL THROUGH TEACHING

Best Established Teacher at School Level

School of Mathematical and Computer Studies
Faculty of Science and Agriculture

Prof Julius Mhlanga



With more than 21 years of experience in tertiary education, Professor Julius Mhlanga has dedicated his career to helping students understand mathematics, develop confidence and realise their potential

As a Professor of Applied Mathematics at the University of Limpopo, Mhlanga believes that effective teaching goes beyond explaining concepts. It requires creating an environment where students can ask questions, learn from mistakes and discover solutions for themselves.

"My teaching philosophy is grounded in the belief that students learn best when they actively engage with ideas, work together and tackle problems themselves,"

he says.

His teaching approach includes group discussions, problem-solving activities, blended learning and online platforms such as Blackboard and WhatsApp. These methods allow students from different backgrounds and with varying levels of mathematical knowledge to participate and support one another. What brings him the greatest satisfaction is seeing students overcome their fear of mathematics.



Many students arrive in my classes believing they are not good at mathematics. Watching them gain confidence and solve problems they once thought were impossible is one of the most rewarding parts of my work

According to him, the real reward of teaching is also evident in the achievements of his former students. Some have become lecturers, researchers, schoolteachers, data analysts, actuaries and engineers.

Among them are Dr SC Nkosi, Dr NH Sekgothe and Dr RK Mahlakwana, who completed their PhDs and are now senior lecturers in the same department where they once studied under him.

His commitment to teaching has earned him recognition at institutional and national levels. In 2020, he was named Best Overall Established Teacher at the University of Limpopo. He also participated in the 2026 National University Teaching Award programme, where he is set to receive a commendation later this year.



INSPIRING STUDENTS TO TAKE LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Best Established Teacher at School Level

School of Medicine
Faculty of Health Sciences

Dr Solomon Makwela



His passion for teaching began informally while he was still in high school, when he supported fellow learners with Mathematics and Biology. That early experience shaped his interest in helping others understand and engage with learning

Today, Dr Solomon Makwela is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Limpopo, where he teaches Community Nutrition and Nutrition Programme Management at various levels.

He formally entered academia in 2012 as a lecturer in the Department of Human Nutrition.

Dr Makwela's teaching philosophy is centred on student-centred learning, where students take an active role in their own learning. He encourages peer-to-peer learning through group discussions and the use of multimedia resources while guiding students towards achieving the required curriculum outcomes.

"I am fulfilled when my students actively engage in their learning, master the content and carry their education beyond the classroom into practice."

"Nothing compares to the fulfilment of seeing my graduates excel in their professional environments and make a difference in their respective fields."

For Makwela, teaching is not only about helping students understand the content. He wants them to apply what they learn in their professional and personal lives. He is particularly motivated by seeing former students succeed as professionals, entrepreneurs, policymakers and researchers.

Dr Makwela is no stranger to awards. In 2025, his team received the Best Upcoming Community Engagement Team Award at the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards.



PREPARING NURSES TO SAVE LIVES THROUGH EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

Best Overall Established Teacher in the University

School of Health Care Sciences
Faculty of Health Sciences



Prof Irene Ramavhoya

With more than three decades of nursing experience, Professor Irene Ramavhoya has dedicated her career to preparing nurses to provide competent, compassionate and ethical care

A Professor of Nursing in the Department of Nursing Sciences at the University of Limpopo, she teaches final-year Midwifery Nursing Science, focusing on high-risk pregnancies, labour and birth. Prof Ramavhoya began her nursing career in 1994, spending 17 years in primary healthcare before joining academia in 2016. Her clinical experience continues to shape her teaching, helping students understand the realities of caring for mothers and babies. "I believe students must be actively involved in their learning. They need to ask questions, think critically and apply what they learn to real clinical

situations," she says. Her teaching combines classroom instruction with simulation, role-play, clinical scenarios, group discussions and practical activities. She also identifies students who are struggling and provides additional support to help them master difficult concepts.

"Seeing my students grow into confident, competent nurses who make a meaningful difference in the lives of mothers, newborns and families is what makes teaching truly rewarding."

This approach has yielded impressive results. Since taking responsibility for the final-year midwifery modules, more than 300 students have graduated, with a 100% final pass rate across both semesters. Her commitment to community engagement also gives students opportunities to apply their

knowledge beyond the classroom. Through initiatives such as the Phelophepa Health Care Train and the Ubuntu HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis Project, students develop practical skills while serving communities.

Prof Ramavhoya has authored or co-authored 34 publications and contributed to postgraduate education, curriculum development and academic leadership. Her achievements include the 2025 Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for Best Overall Female Researcher and promotion to Professor of Nursing in 2026. She also received an NRF C2 research rating in 2026.



Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards in Community Engagement



CELEBRATING COMMUNITY PROJECTS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Cuzette du Plessis

Acting Director: Rural Development
and Innovation Hub



The University of Limpopo's Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Community Engagement recognise projects that address community needs by linking teaching and learning, research and community participation

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EXCELLENCE AWARDS



The awards promote community engagement as an integral part of the university's academic work, bringing students, academics and community members together to find practical solutions to local challenges. They also encourage community ownership by ensuring that projects respond to priorities

identified by the people they serve. In 2026, the university's community engagement initiatives included projects from all four faculties.

These initiatives demonstrate how the university draws on its academic expertise and partnerships to address community needs while

creating learning opportunities for students and other participants. Through these awards, UL aims to encourage projects that deliver lasting benefits to communities and strengthen the relationship between the University and the people it serves.



BUILDING HEALTHIER SCHOOLS THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Best Up-coming Community Engagement Team in the Faculty
Faculty of Health Sciences



Dr Tivani Mashamba & Team “

Project name:

Strengthening Health-Promoting School Implementation through Participatory School Health Committees: An Implementation Science Approach in a Selected School in Limpopo Province, South Africa

This approach creates an opportunity for stakeholders to contribute their knowledge and experience to building a safer, healthier and more supportive learning environment.

Improving learners' academic performance starts with creating a healthy environment in which children can learn, grow and thrive, this is according to community engagement project in the Faculty of Health Sciences

Their community engagement project, Strengthening Health-Promoting School Implementation through Participatory School Health Committees: An Implementation Science Approach in a Selected School in Limpopo Province, South Africa, seeks to strengthen the link between health and education in rural communities.

Led by **Dr Tivani Mashamba, alongside Professor Takalani Tshitangano, Dr Rirhandzu Mabasa, Sekgero Leshilo and Mzambia Mazozo**, the initiative focuses on introducing the Health-Promoting School approach at a selected rural primary school in the Hlanganani Circuit, Vhembe District.

The school was selected because of its rural setting and Quintile 3 classification, as well as its efforts to collaborate with stakeholders and improve academic achievement despite the challenges facing its learners.

The project responds to a need for greater awareness and understanding of the Health-Promoting School concept in Limpopo. Although the World Health Organization and UNESCO recommend this approach to support healthier school environments, many schools in the province have limited understanding of how it works.

A Health-Promoting School strengthens its capacity to provide a healthy setting for learning, working and playing. The initiative recognises that learners' well-being and educational progress are closely connected, and that creating supportive school environments requires more than classroom teaching alone. Through participatory school health committees, the project brings together educators, parents, healthcare

professionals, community leaders and learners to identify challenges affecting school health and work towards practical solutions.

Dr Mashamba and her team aim to encourage shared responsibility for learner well-being by strengthening collaboration between the school and its surrounding community. This approach creates an opportunity for stakeholders to contribute their knowledge and experience to building a safer, healthier and more supportive learning environment.

For the school community, the initiative offers an opportunity to strengthen health awareness, promote healthy lifestyles and improve cooperation between

education and healthcare stakeholders. It also provides a platform to address issues affecting learners' ability to participate fully in school life.

The project supports broader development goals, including quality education, good health and well-being, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and partnerships for sustainable development.

By introducing the Health-Promoting School approach in a rural Limpopo school, the team hopes to demonstrate how meaningful community participation can help schools respond to local needs and create conditions that support both health and academic achievement.



MAKING MUSIC, MOVEMENT AND DANCE PART OF EARLY LEARNING

Project name:

Music, Movement and Dance - Foundation Phase Educators

Best Up-coming Engagement Scholar in the Faculty

School of Education
Faculty of Humanities



Dr Barbara Nagel

Dr Barbara Nagel says that music is more than a classroom activity. It is a practical teaching tool that can help young learners understand concepts, participate confidently in lessons and enjoy learning

Her community engagement project, *Music, Movement and Dance - Foundation Phase Educators*, was developed in early 2025 following her doctoral research, which identified a lack of music integration in Foundation Phase classrooms. The research found that teachers often lacked the knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation to incorporate music into their teaching, despite its role in learners' holistic development under the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

"I developed this project to help Foundation Phase teachers gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to use music as part of everyday teaching," says Dr Nagel.

The project addresses this gap through interactive workshops that introduce teachers to four elements of music: pitch, rhythm, dynamics and tempo. These are incorporated into practical classroom activities such as singing, listening, dancing, movement and playing percussion instruments.

Teachers also learn to create percussion instruments from recycled materials, showing them how to use accessible resources to make lessons engaging without relying on expensive equipment. A digital booklet further supports the application of the activities in their classrooms.

Over two years, the project reached 72 teachers across six primary schools in and around Mankweng, while also giving 29 second-year education students an opportunity to apply their university learning in real classroom settings.

In 2025, 12 students enrolled in Music, Dance and Movement (HMDM021) volunteered to observe three workshops. In 2026, the

“

I developed this project to help Foundation Phase teachers gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to use music as part of everyday teaching”

number increased to 17 students, who took a more active role by co-presenting workshops.

Dr Nagel says the project benefits both practising teachers and future educators by connecting theory with classroom practice. Through music, teachers can reinforce concepts across learning areas, including Mathematics, Languages and Life Skills.

The value of this approach was reflected in feedback from a participating student, who explained that songs and actions could help learners remember information, practise counting and learn classroom routines while remaining actively involved in lessons.

Teachers have also welcomed the opportunity to strengthen their teaching skills. One participant described the workshop as fruitful, saying it inspired them to try new ideas and made them feel supported and valued as a professional. According to Dr Nagel, teachers' willingness to attend workshops after school hours demonstrates their interest in developing practical skills they can use in their classrooms.



CELEBRATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS INTO ACTION

Project name:

Citizen Engagement addressing the Risk of Environmental Pollution to River Health, Sustainable Development and Biodiversity

Best Established Community Engagement Team in the University

Faculty of Science and Agriculture



Project team: Professor Wilmien Luus-Powell (team leader), Farina Lindeque, Dr Millicent Kekana, Dr Willem Smit, Modjadji Lebepe, Professor Danitza Kloppe and Dr Izelque Botha.

According to Professor Wilmien Luus-Powell and her team, scientific research goes beyond laboratories and academic publications. It is about working alongside communities to find practical solutions to environmental challenges affecting their daily lives.

Through the project *Citizen Engagement Addressing the Risk of Environmental Pollution to River Health, Sustainable Development and Biodiversity*, the team is raising environmental awareness and promoting community participation in Mamotintane, Ga-Motholo and the wider Mankweng area.

Coordinated through the DSTI-NRF SARCHI Chair in Ecosystem Health, the initiative brings together university researchers, students, schools, government representatives and community partners to address water pollution, plastic waste and environmental degradation.

The project began after the team observed pollution in streams and neighbourhoods around Mankweng. Working with Makgwadiba Primary School, the researchers engaged learners in environmental games, neighbourhood observations, mapping exercises and river-health assessments. These activities enabled learners to identify littering and informal waste dumping as key challenges and propose practical solutions, including recycling, clean-up campaigns and environmental awareness initiatives.

Their participation led to the establishment of the Makgwadiba Science Club and the development of an environmental action plan, placing learners at the centre of finding solutions to problems affecting their community.

The project's impact extends beyond environmental education. Approximately 35 Grade 7 learners participated in citizen-science

The Best-Established Community Engagement Team in the University, led by Professor Wilmien Luus-Powell, empowers learners and communities to address environmental pollution, promote recycling and protect freshwater ecosystems



activities, with 23 completing the programme. Learners gained practical scientific skills through stream investigations, microscope activities and miniSASS assessments, which use aquatic organisms to assess river health.

The initiative has also translated awareness into action through recycling and upcycling activities. In 2024, more than 150 volunteers participated in the Plastic Patrol, collecting 180 kg of plastic, of which 52 kg was sorted for recycling. Ten trees were also donated to the school. Subsequent Mandela Day activities continued to mobilise university staff, students and community partners around waste management. In 2025, learners participated in an upcycling challenge, creating useful and decorative products from discarded materials.

Meanwhile, the programme has integrated community waste activities into university teaching, giving students practical experience in waste collection, classification and analysis. Sorted plastic has also been provided to local waste pickers to sell, linking environmental action with livelihood opportunities.

The project continues to strengthen partnerships with community initiatives, including Tau Sejala Enterprise, LuMo Bricks and Construction, and Green2Gold Recycling Solutions. Through these collaborations, environmental awareness is connected to recycling, skills development and potential livelihood opportunities.



“**Lasting environmental change begins when communities are empowered to identify the challenges affecting them and participate in developing practical solutions.**”

The project demonstrates how community engagement can connect scientific knowledge with everyday experiences, helping communities take ownership of their environment while preparing students to become socially responsible professionals.



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S
EXCELLENCE AWARDS





Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards in Research



CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE:

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AWARDS



Dr Thembinkosi Mabila

Director: Research Administration and Development

The Research Excellence Awards are prestigious annual awards presented to deserving staff members affiliated with the different Schools of the university, based on research outputs during the preceding three years, excluding the year in which the call to apply is made

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EXCELLENCE AWARDS



The awards recognise research excellence at UL, promote research among female academics and honour researchers for their outstanding achievements.

The following Research Excellence Awards are available to academic and research staff members in the stated categories:

- The Best Emerging Researcher;
- The Best Established Researcher;
- The Best Overall Female Researcher in the University;
- The Best Overall Researcher in the University; and
- Researcher who has generated the largest research income.

This year's awardees are a remarkable group whose work speaks directly to the university's Strategic Plan, particularly Goal 5, which focuses on improving UL's research standing and status. They are not simply productive academics. They are the people behind the university's Science, Engineering and Technology priorities, UL's National Research Foundation rating pipeline, the drive to develop female researchers, and the growing strength in Research Niche Areas such as agriculture, health, materials and energy, and digital systems.

Every awardee is actively connected to UL's research niche areas, the work of the research chairs, existing partnerships or contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals. In simple terms, these are the researchers who are turning the University's motto, Finding Solutions for Africa, into tangible work with local relevance, regional impact and global reach.

The evidence behind this group is impressive and broad. Sixteen recipients currently hold grants from the National Research Foundation, the South African Medical Research

Council, the Agricultural Research Council and other science granting councils. Seventeen are NRF rated researchers.

All are actively supervising master's and doctoral students and maintaining national and international research partnerships. Collectively, they have produced a combined total of 49,8096 journal units in the last year. When the spotlight is drawn to the three years under review, the units quadrupled.

This is a substantial body of knowledge that reflects sustained investment in research over time. Many in this group also have strong citation profiles, with H indices around 17 and i10 indices reaching 29. For the general reader, this means their work is not only published but also read, used and cited

by other scholars, which is a sign of real scholarly influence. On the available evidence, this group currently has the strongest combined H index and i10 index profile of any cohort of researchers affiliated with the University. In other words, these awards recognise not only individual achievement but also a collective momentum that is helping to position UL as a research led, African centred university with a growing voice in the global knowledge economy.

From a personal perspective, working with each of these researchers is both a marvel and an inspiring experience. Each of them deserves the accolades, and I congratulate all the awardees in this edition of our Vice Chancellor's Research Excellence Awards.



RESEARCH TO IMPROVE BETTER GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Best Up-coming Researcher in the School - First
School of Economics and Management
Faculty of Management and Law

Dr Selaelo Mabeba



Dr Selaelo Mabeba, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Public Administration at the University of Limpopo, conducts research aimed at improving government performance and the delivery of public services in South Africa

His research focuses on public sector governance, skills development, human resource management and service delivery. He examines challenges such as skills shortages, employee retention, ineffective internship programmes, limited municipal capacity and public participation. His work also explores how technological change affects rural communities and how social protection programmes influence the people they are intended to support.

Dr Mabeba believes that capable public institutions depend on skilled employees, effective management and meaningful engagement with communities. His research seeks to provide evidence that policymakers and government institutions can use to improve policies, strengthen institutional capacity and respond to the needs of citizens.

After completing his PhD in 2025, Dr Mabeba published 21 research outputs between 2018 and 2026, comprising 14 accredited journal articles and seven conference proceedings. Nine scholarly papers published between 2023 and 2025 addressed issues ranging from municipal governance and skills development to human resource management and social development. He has presented his research at international social sciences conferences in South Africa and

Mauritius, engaging with fellow researchers and receiving feedback to strengthen his work. His publications have attracted 158 citations.

“I want my research to help government institutions improve their practices and deliver services that make a difference in people's lives.”

Dr Mabeba has also supervised seven master's and 27 honours students to completion, with some projects completed through co-supervision. His published work has opened opportunities for him to assess master's research projects at other universities.

BRINGING TSHIVENDA LITERATURE TO THE CENTRE OF AFRICAN SCHOLARSHIP

Best Up-coming Researcher in the School - Second
School of Languages and Communication Studies
Faculty of Humanities



Prof Moffat Sebola

Professor Moffat Sebola is committed to preserving and advancing Tshivenda literature through research that explores the history, culture, beliefs and identity of the Vhavenda people

His research examines Tshivenda poetry as a record of indigenous knowledge, showing how poets express African identity, philosophy and cultural experiences.

His work explores traditional religion, cosmology, cultural astronomy, rituals, music, dance, gender, migration, land and the effects of colonialism on African communities.

Prof Sebola's research responds to the marginalisation of African-language literature in academic spaces. By examining the ideas and experiences expressed through Tshivenda poetry, he seeks to ensure that African knowledge

systems and perspectives receive greater recognition in scholarship. His work contributes to the documentation and interpretation of indigenous knowledge, helping readers and researchers understand how communities preserve their identities, explain their world and respond to social and historical change. It also creates opportunities for African-language literature to inform wider debates about culture, history and belonging.

“For me, Tshivenda poetry is more than a form of artistic expression. It preserves knowledge, history and the experiences through which the Vhavenda understand themselves and their place in the world.”

Prof Sebola has produced more than 40 academic publications, including journal articles and book chapters. His research has attracted 110 citations on Google Scholar, with an h-index of six. He also supervises

postgraduate students researching African languages and related cultural themes. Nine students have graduated under his supervision, while further postgraduate students are working towards completing their qualifications.

His achievements include the University of Limpopo's Best Upcoming Researcher in the School of Languages and Communication Studies Award in 2022 and the African Language Association of Southern Africa's Best Emerging Researcher in African Languages Award in 2023.

Following the completion of his PhD in Tshivenda at the University of Limpopo in 2022, Sebola was promoted to Associate Professor of African Languages.



PRESERVING XITSONGA HERITAGE

THROUGH RESEARCH AND LITERATURE

Best Up-coming Researcher in the School - First
School of Languages and Communication Studies
Faculty of Humanities

Mr Ndzalama Maluleke



Ndzalama Maluleke, a lecturer in Xitsonga in the Department of Languages at the University of Limpopo, is committed to preserving the language, culture and indigenous knowledge of the Vatsonga through research and literature

His research examines how Xitsonga poetry, proverbs and literary texts preserve cultural knowledge, communicate moral values and address social challenges. His work explores issues such as corruption, greed, professional ethics, gender, identity and the influence of culture on human behaviour.

According to Maluleke, studying literature is also a way of understanding society. By examining how writers portray moral choices and social problems,

his research encourages readers to reflect on issues affecting their communities. He also seeks to address the limited representation of African-language literature in academic research and to strengthen the recognition of Xitsonga as a language of scholarship and knowledge production.

“**Researching Xitsonga literature allows us to preserve our cultural knowledge while examining the challenges facing our society. It is important that our language remains part of academic conversations.**”

Maluleke has published 17 research articles and a book chapter, with further manuscripts awaiting publication. He has presented research at national and international conferences and serves on the executive committee of the Southern African Folklore Society. He is also pursuing a PhD in Xitsonga at the

University of Limpopo.

His contribution extends to developing specialised terminology that allows Xitsonga to be used in fields such as mathematics, natural sciences, law, medicine, gender studies and communication. This work helps expand access to knowledge in African languages and supports their use in education and professional settings.

He has supervised 20 honours students, 17 of whom have graduated, as well as five master's students, three of whom have completed their qualifications.

His achievements include second place in the poetry category of the 2024 Xitsonga Literary Awards and third place in Xitsonga Drama at the 2025 Limpopo Department of Sport, Arts and Culture Literary Awards. He was also a finalist in the National Library of South Africa competition in 2021.

MAKING EDUCATION MORE INCLUSIVE THROUGH RESEARCH

Best Up-coming Researcher in the School - First

School of Education
Faculty of Humanities

Dr Medwin Sepadi



Dr Medwin Sepadi says that education should give every learner a fair opportunity to learn, participate and succeed, regardless of their circumstances or abilities

His research focuses on inclusive education, teacher development and curriculum implementation, particularly in rural and resource-constrained schools.

As a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education Studies at the University of Limpopo, Dr Sepadi investigates why the implementation of inclusive education policies does not always match what happens in classrooms. His work examines teachers' knowledge, attitudes and preparedness to support learners with disabilities, including autistic learners, as well as learners from marginalised communities. His research also explores how professional development can equip

teachers with the knowledge and practical skills needed to create inclusive learning environments. By identifying gaps between education policies and classroom practice, his work can help inform teacher training, curriculum development and support programmes that respond to learners' needs.

“ Research must do more than generate knowledge; it must inform policy, reform practice and empower educators.”

Dr Sepadi's research also considers challenges affecting learning, including the shortage of social workers providing psychosocial support in schools, barriers to literacy development and the use of technology in rural education. These areas highlight the need to consider both classroom teaching and the wider support learners need to succeed. He completed his PhD in Curriculum Studies in 2023,

researching teachers' content knowledge in continuous professional development programmes for implementing inclusive education in Limpopo. Between 2023 and 2025, he published more than 12 peer-reviewed articles in accredited international journals and contributed several book chapters. In 2024, he edited *Global Practices in Inclusive Education Curriculum and Policy*, bringing together perspectives on inclusive education from different contexts.

His contribution extends beyond publications. As Deputy Lead Coordinator of the Beyers Naude Schools Development Programme in Sekhukhune East District, he contributes to work aimed at strengthening schools and supporting teachers. He also serves as a theme leader for psychosocial support under the NRF/UL Chair and participates in the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning steering committee.



ADVANCING LIVESTOCK RESEARCH TO SUPPORT FOOD SECURITY

Best Up-coming Researcher in the School - First
School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences
Faculty of Science and Agriculture

Prof Grace Manyelo



Professor Grace Manyelo, an Associate Professor in Animal Production at the University of Limpopo, is using research to improve livestock production, strengthen food security and support farming communities in Southern Africa

An NRF Y2-rated researcher, Prof Manyelo specialises in animal nutrition, particularly poultry nutrition. Her research also covers small-ruminant nutrition and production, environmental management, and sustainable livestock and crop production systems.

Her work addresses challenges linked to poverty, food insecurity and gender inequality. By improving knowledge of animal nutrition and sustainable farming practices, her research contributes to efforts to help farmers improve livestock productivity and support their livelihoods. She also promotes community-based livestock

production programmes that create opportunities for women and young people, including girls interested in agriculture.

Prof Manyelo is motivated by research that improves farming practices and livelihoods.

Her work supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on No Poverty, Zero Hunger and Gender Equality.

“Research matters when it helps farming communities improve livestock production, strengthen food security and create better opportunities for future generations.”

Her research record includes 50 published articles, three book chapters and 1,299 citations. She has presented 25 research posters and oral presentations at national and international platforms. She also serves as sub-editor of the South African Journal of Animal Sciences and reviews articles for

local and international journals.

Prof Manyelo is equally committed to developing the next generation of animal scientists. She has supervised or co-supervised 15 master's students and more than 40 honours students to completion. She currently supervises or co-supervises eight honours, eight master's and seven doctoral students, as well as a postdoctoral fellow.

Her achievements include the University of Limpopo's Best Upcoming Teacher Award in 2021 and Best Overall Upcoming Researcher Award in 2023. In 2026, she received the Research Excellence Award for Early Career / Emerging Researchers at the National Research Foundation Awards Ceremony. She has also completed two research projects as principal investigator, funded by the NRF Thuthuka programme and the Water Research Commission.

RESEARCH TACKLES CLIMATE CHANGE

FOOD SECURITY AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS

Best Established Researcher in the School - First

School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences
Faculty of Science and Agriculture



Prof Mmapatla Senyolo

Research by University of Limpopo agricultural economist Professor Mmapatla Senyolo focuses on finding practical ways to help smallholder farmers respond to climate change, improve food security and strengthen their livelihoods

Her work focuses on Agricultural Economics and Development, with particular attention to Climate-Smart Agriculture, sustainable agricultural development, food security, livelihoods, gender and socioeconomic analysis. She examines factors influencing agricultural practices and technology adoption, with the aim of helping farming households become more resilient while improving food and nutrition security.

Her research addresses challenges faced by smallholder farmers and resource-constrained communities,

including climate change, food insecurity, gender inequalities and livelihood vulnerability.

The research has implications beyond farming. By supporting more sustainable and resilient food systems, it seeks to improve household livelihoods, strengthen food security and provide evidence to inform policies and programmes aimed at rural development.

“ I am driven by the desire to generate evidence that informs inclusive agricultural policies, strengthens climate resilience and contributes to meaningful, lasting improvements in people's lives.”

Her research has resulted in 22 published manuscripts and three book chapters, with four additional papers under review. She has also delivered more than 50 presentations at national and international conferences, while her work had attracted 657 citations as at October 2026.

Her research has received funding from the National Research Foundation (NRF), Agricultural Research Council (ARC), Water Research Commission (WRC) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Prof Senyolo has also contributed to postgraduate research development, having supervised 25 master's and more than 42 honours students to graduation. She has mentored one postdoctoral fellow and two research assistants and is currently supervising two PhD, 10 master's and eight honours students.

In 2024, she achieved an NRF-Y2 rating for the 2025-2030 period. Her other achievements include the 2025 Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for Best Established Community Engagement Project at Faculty level. She was also recognised for Teaching and Learning as the Overall Best Established Teacher at School level in 2021 and at University level in 2024.



MAKING FINANCIAL MATHEMATICS WORK FOR REAL WORLD CHALLENGES

Best Established Researcher in the School - Second
School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences
Faculty of Science and Agriculture



Prof Julius Mhlanga

According to Professor Julius Mhlanga, research in financial mathematics is about finding better ways to understand financial risk and make sound investment decisions in uncertain markets

A Professor of Applied Mathematics in the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics at the University of Limpopo, his research focuses on financial mathematics, particularly portfolio optimisation, insurance mathematics, risk management and the pricing of financial assets.

His work addresses the limitations of traditional mathematical models, which do not always reflect the uncertainty and volatility of real financial markets. By developing alternative approaches to pricing and hedging, he seeks to help investors and institutions better

manage risk and make informed financial decisions. "What motivates me is the challenge of connecting mathematical theory with real-world financial problems. I want to develop models that are mathematically sound and useful in situations where traditional approaches fall short," he says.

His research has practical relevance for pension funds, insurance companies and wealth managers, which must make investment decisions while balancing risk and returns. His work also explores model-free finance, which examines ways to price and hedge financial assets without relying on a specific model of how prices evolve.

Prof Mhlanga's research achievements include 19 articles published in DHET-accredited journals, with five more under review. He has presented 24 papers at national and international

conferences and supervised seven doctoral, six master's and 35 honours students to completion. Beyond his research, he has helped strengthen mathematical sciences education.

He led the SA-UK University Staff Doctoral Programme, supported by a R6.25 million British Council grant, which enabled 10 staff members to pursue doctoral qualifications. Nine participants have since graduated and secured positions at universities across South Africa.

"Seeing my postgraduate students succeed and knowing that our research can help address real financial challenges is deeply rewarding."

His contributions have earned him a C2 rating from the National Research Foundation in 2024.

ADVANCING MULTILINGUALISM THROUGH LANGUAGE RESEARCH



Best Established Researcher in the School - First

School of Languages and Communication Studies
Faculty of Humanities

Prof Barrington Ntombela

Prof Barrington Ntombela's research explores how English interacts with other languages and how these relationships shape the way people communicate, learn and understand one another

His work examines language variation and contact, with a particular focus on sociolinguistics, morphology, syntax and semantics. Prof Ntombela says that language research goes beyond grammar and vocabulary. It also questions why some language varieties are regarded as more prestigious than others and how these perceptions affect their speakers.

His research examines the implications of speaking a prestigious variety of English, the influence of language variation on language acquisition, and how it can support proficiency in additional

languages. This work contributes to a better understanding of multilingualism and challenges assumptions that place some languages or varieties above others for reasons unrelated to their linguistic value.

By investigating how language is used in different social settings, his research can help educators and language practitioners better understand learners' linguistic backgrounds and the challenges they may face when acquiring additional languages.

“One of my greatest achievements is seeing my doctoral students grow into academics who are making their own contributions to the field.”

Prof Ntombela has published 54 journal articles and his work has attracted 346 citations on Google Scholar. He has also supervised two master's students and nine doctoral students to completion, helping to

develop the next generation of researchers in language studies.

One of the achievements he values most is seeing his students progress in their academic careers. Two of his former doctoral students have gone on to occupy senior academic positions, with one becoming a professor and another becoming a departmental chairperson.

His academic contributions have also earned recognition. He was a runner-up in a Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for Teaching and Learning at the University of Zululand.

The Academy for Multilingualism at the University of the Free State recognised his contribution to the development of multilingualism nationally and internationally. The University of Limpopo's Faculty of Humanities also honoured him as its most supportive academic.



RESEARCHING BETTER MENTAL HEALTH

FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Best Established Researcher in the School - Second
School of Medicine
Faculty of Health Sciences

Dr Gsakani Sumbane



Dr Gsakani Sumbane says that mental health research is about understanding the challenges people face and finding better ways to support them

As an Advanced Psychiatric Nurse and researcher, she focuses on mental health, autism, intellectual disability, adolescent behavioural health and LGBTQI+ health, with particular attention to underserved communities in Limpopo.

Much of her research explores the experiences of children with autism and intellectual disabilities, as well as the parents, teachers and caregivers who support them. She also studies the emotional and behavioural challenges faced by adolescents, including those living without parental care.

Through interviews and other qualitative research methods, Dr

Sumbane gives people an opportunity to share their experiences in their own words. Her findings help identify gaps in health and social services and can inform clinical practice, education and the development of support programmes, particularly in rural communities where access to specialised services may be limited. One of her notable achievements is developing a model to support parents and teachers of children with autism spectrum disorders. The model reflects her commitment to helping those who care for children better understand and respond to their needs.

Much of her research explores the experiences of children with autism and intellectual disabilities, as well as the parents, teachers and caregivers who support them.

"My motivation comes from my clinical experience as an Advanced

Psychiatric Nurse and my longstanding interest in child and adolescent mental health," she explains.

Dr Sumbane has authored or co-authored 41 peer-reviewed articles and three book chapters. Her research has attracted more than 430 citations, with a Google Scholar h-index of 10 and an i10-index of 11. In 2025, she received first place for Best Staff Oral Presenter at the University of Limpopo's Faculty of Health Sciences Research Day.

She has also supervised 13 master's students to completion and currently supervises two doctoral and six master's students. Her research collaborations include work with colleagues at the University of Venda and the University of the Free State.

SECURING WIRELESS NETWORK

THROUGH
RESEARCH AND
INNOVATION

Best Established Researcher in the School - First

School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences
Faculty of Science and Agriculture

Prof Mthulisi Velempini



As cyber threats continue to grow, Professor Mthulisi Velempini is researching ways to make wireless networks safer, more reliable and more efficient

His work in telecommunications engineering focuses on network security, privacy, performance and the quality of service users receive when accessing digital technologies.

His research examines how wireless networks can detect security threats early without slowing down their performance. He develops models, techniques and protocols to improve network security, with particular attention to intrusion detection systems that are both accurate and efficient.

This work is important as people increasingly depend on digital networks for communication, education, business and access to information. By investigating how security measures affect network

performance, Professor Velempini seeks to improve the balance between protecting users' information and ensuring reliable connectivity.

Professor Velempini's research record includes 42 research articles, 21 book chapters and 68 conference proceedings, excluding publications from 2026. His work has attracted increasing citations since 2021, reflecting growing engagement with his research.

"I am motivated by the growing cybersecurity threats and the need to understand how security measures affect network performance."

His achievements include being named Best Researcher in the School in 2020 and Best Researcher in the Faculty in 2019. He became a Senior Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) in 2020 and received the

second-best paper award at IEEE AFRICON in 2015. Earlier recognition includes a doctoral funding package through the KW Johnson Bequest at the University of Cape Town and funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

His research has also received support from several funding programmes, including the National Research Foundation's Thuthuka, CSUR and CPRR programmes, as well as Sentech and MICT SETA. He is also associated with an NRF South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair for the 2026-2030 period.

Beyond research, Professor Velempini is committed to developing future researchers. He has supervised 20 master's students and five doctoral students to completion, with additional students nearing completion.



FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVING RURAL LIVELIHOODS

Best Established Researcher in the School - First
Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership (TGSL)
Faculty of Management and Law



Prof Thanyani Madzivhandila

Professor Thanyani Madzivhandila's research focuses on finding ways to improve people's lives while protecting the environment

As a Development Planning and Management professor at the University of Limpopo, he studies issues affecting communities, particularly rural areas, including climate change, environmental management, entrepreneurship and development policy.

He also holds the DSTI / NRF-Sasol Foundation South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Development Studies, with a focus on environmental and socioeconomic sustainability. His research examines how development policies and programmes can respond to the needs of communities while taking environmental challenges into account. His interests also include indigenous knowledge systems,

which can help inform approaches to managing natural resources and responding to local challenges. Through his work on rural development, climate change and disaster management, Prof Madzivhandila contributes to discussions on how communities can strengthen their livelihoods, prepare for environmental risks and pursue sustainable economic opportunities.

“**I believe research should speak to the challenges communities face and contribute to finding practical ways of addressing them.**”

Prof Madzivhandila has built a strong research record, with more than 50 peer-reviewed papers and book chapters. He has also served as a guest editor for journals and publications focusing on development and public affairs, contributing to academic discussions in these fields.

Developing other researchers is another important part of his work. He has mentored and supervised master's and doctoral students, helping to build research capacity and prepare emerging scholars to contribute to development studies.

Beyond the university, he chairs the Scientific Committee of the Limpopo Research Forum and serves as Treasurer of the SAAPAM Limpopo Chapter. He founded and chairs the TGSL Global Leadership and Sustainability Symposium and is a member of the Academy of Science of South Africa's Forum on Just Transition.

He obtained his PhD in Administration for Development from the University of Limpopo in 2015.

TURNING HEALTH RESEARCH INTO SOLUTIONS FOR COMMUNITIES

Best Established Researcher in the School - First

School of Medicine

Faculty of Health Sciences



Prof Mabitsela Mphasha

Professor Mabitsela Mphasha is committed to improving healthcare through research that addresses diabetes, public health nutrition and the challenges facing health systems, particularly in rural and underserved communities

His work focuses on finding practical ways to improve health outcomes by ensuring that research findings inform healthcare practice and reach the communities that need them most.

For Prof Mphasha, research must do more than identify problems. It must help develop solutions that respond to people's circumstances and strengthen the ability of healthcare systems to meet their needs. His work explores how evidence can be translated into locally relevant interventions that improve disease prevention,

nutrition and the management of non-communicable diseases. This commitment is reflected in his involvement in multidisciplinary research initiatives.

He contributes to the AMEN project, an internationally funded collaboration with University College Dublin, led by Professor Livhuwani Muthelo and supported by the Irish Government. He is also involved in a South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) programme focusing on the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases, led by Professor Tebogo Mothiba.

His work explores how evidence can be translated into locally relevant interventions that improve disease prevention, nutrition and the management of non-communicable diseases.

Prof Mphasha has published more than 40 peer-reviewed journal articles and received over 450 citations. He holds an NRF Y2 research rating and has secured competitive research funding, including a grant from the South African Medical Research Council's Research Capacity Development Initiative.

Developing future researchers is another important part of his work. He has supervised seven master's students and one doctoral student to completion, with a further six master's and two doctoral students nearing examination.

His research philosophy is influenced by Robert Sobukwe's view of education as a form of service to Africa, which aligns with the University of Limpopo's commitment to finding solutions for the continent.



USING DIGITAL HEALTH RESEARCH TO IMPROVE MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTHCARE

Best Established Researcher in the School - First

School of Health Care Sciences
Faculty of Health Sciences



Prof Livhuwani Muthelo

Professor Livhuwani Muthelo, an Associate Professor of Nursing Science at the University of Limpopo, is committed to finding practical ways to improve maternal and child healthcare through research and digital technology

Her research focuses on maternal and child digital health and occupational health, with particular emphasis on developing solutions that respond to the needs of healthcare workers, mothers and communities.

Through collaboration with communities, the Department of Health and multidisciplinary research partners, Prof Muthelo develops digital health interventions designed to support healthcare delivery. These include the AMEN personalised maternal mobile health initiative and a midwife-led triage application developed

through her PhD supervision. Such innovations seek to support access to health information and assist healthcare professionals in assessing and managing patients.

“What motivates me is the opportunity to conduct research that responds to real challenges in healthcare and contributes to improving the care people receive.”

Her research is strengthened by national partnerships with institutions such as the University of Pretoria and the University of Cape Town, as well as international collaboration with University College Dublin in Ireland.

Prof Muthelo has published 62 peer-reviewed journal articles and three book chapters. She has supervised 14 postgraduate students to completion, including three doctoral and 11 master's graduates. Her work has attracted significant

research funding, including approximately R6 million from Research Ireland in 2025, approximately R18 million in project funding in 2026, and additional support from the South African Medical Research Council, Wits/NRF and USDP/DHET.

Her achievements include the 2019 Best Paper Presenter Award at an occupational health conference in Miami, the University of Limpopo's Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for Best Female Researcher in 2022, and the Best Oral Presenter Award at the UK Digital Health and Analytics Conference in 2025.

Beyond research, she serves as Deputy Chairperson of the Limpopo Department of Health Ethics Committee and sits on the University of Limpopo's Ethics Committee. She also contributes to international scholarship as an academic editor for PLOS ONE and BMC Public Health.

ADVANCING WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Best Overall Female Researcher in the University

School of Health Care Sciences
Faculty of Health Sciences



Prof Melitah Rasweswe

Professor Melitah Rasweswe says improving women's health begins with understanding that reproductive health challenges do not occur in isolation

Her research examines how a woman's experiences at one stage of her reproductive life can affect her health and wellbeing at later stages.

Her work challenges the tendency to treat different stages of reproductive health as separate issues. Instead, she advocates for an approach that considers a woman's health throughout her life, allowing for earlier intervention, continued support and care that takes cultural circumstances into account.

Prof Rasweswe uses participatory research methods, including

Photovoice and Lekgotla discussions, which allow participants to share their experiences and contribute to the research process. By placing women's voices at the centre of her work, she seeks to produce findings that reflect their lived experiences and can inform more responsive healthcare services.

Her research has also expanded into digital health, opening further opportunities to explore how technology can support healthcare delivery and access to information.

“Women's reproductive health needs to be understood across the life course, because challenges at one stage can affect their health at another.”

Her contribution to research is reflected in 56 research outputs, including 46 journal articles, four book chapters and one policy brief. Since 2021, her work has received 327 citations, with a Google Scholar h-index of 12 and an i10-index of 15.

Beyond publishing, Prof Rasweswe has supervised nine doctoral and 23 master's students to completion. She continues to supervise eight doctoral and 10 master's students, while mentoring emerging researchers and serving as an external supervisor and examiner for national and international universities.

Her achievements include the University of Limpopo Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for Community Engagement in 2024. She was also named Emerging Researcher of the Year in 2018 and Junior Researcher of the Year in 2020 by the University of Pretoria's Department of Nursing.

She is a principal investigator on two projects funded by the National Research Foundation and the South African Medical Research Council. She also serves as Associate Editor of BMC Reproductive Health and as an advisory editorial board member of the Journal of Health Organization and Management.



RESEARCHER WITH THE LARGEST EXTERNAL RESEARCH FUNDING, 2023-2025

School of Physical and Mineral Sciences
Faculty of Science and Agriculture



Prof Winston Nxumalo

Professor Winston Nxumalo has secured more than R5 million in external research funding for the University of Limpopo between 2023 and 2025, making him the researcher with the largest external research funding during this period

The funding, excluding NRF support, came from major research partners, including the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), the University of Cape Town (UCT), and the University of Ghana, through a sub-agreement involving the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and LifeArc.

The funding supported research aimed at addressing major health

challenges, particularly malaria, TB, cancer and drug discovery. One project, TD Drug Discovery Hit to Lead Optimisation, focused on the development and optimisation of promising drug candidates.

Another, led through UCT, focused on repurposing kinase inhibitor chemotypes as antimalarials, exploring existing compounds for their potential use in malaria treatment.

A further project, funded through the University of Ghana, focused on the discovery of novel antimalarial early leads in Africa, contributing to efforts to identify new compounds that could potentially form the basis of future malaria treatments.

“ Together, these projects contribute to strengthening research capacity at UL and advancing the search for new approaches to tackling infectious diseases. ”

Prof Nxumalo has also contributed to promoting African knowledge in health and medicine. He previously hosted the African Traditional and Natural Product Medicine Conference, which brought together about 300 scientists from various fields, traditional healers, research councils and government entities.

The conference provided a platform for discussions on traditional and natural product medicines and the promotion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS).

RESEARCH TACKLES CHRONIC DISEASES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Best Upcoming Researcher in the University

School of Medicine

Faculty of Health Sciences

Cairo Ntimane

Cairo Ntimane's research focuses on non-communicable diseases, including obesity, hypertension, diabetes and metabolic syndrome, which affect many people in rural South African communities

Working within the DIMAMO Health and Demographic Surveillance System and the multi-country Africa Wits-INDEPTH Partnership for Genomic Studies (AWI-Gen), his research examines health challenges that require locally relevant evidence to improve prevention, diagnosis and care.

Ntimane is particularly concerned about the gap between the burden of disease in rural communities and their representation in health research. He believes that research must respond to the realities of the people it seeks to serve, helping health professionals and policymakers make informed

decisions that address inequalities in healthcare.

His research has contributed to understanding the factors associated with central obesity among rural Black South Africans, the relationship between renal dysfunction and lipid ratios, and the occurrence of multiple chronic conditions and frailty among older people in rural communities. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the health risks facing underserved populations and can help inform approaches to prevention and chronic disease management.

“Health equity motivates me. I have witnessed the burden of preventable disease in Limpopo and the limited access to quality care.”

Ntimane has authored and co-authored more than 45 peer-reviewed research articles published in journals including The Lancet

Healthy Longevity, BMC Public Health, Frontiers and PLOS. His work has received 292 citations, reflecting its contribution to ongoing research in public health and related fields.

Beyond his publications, he contributes to research on health systems strengthening, infection prevention and control, and linking patients to chronic care services. His involvement in the AWI-Gen consortium and research conducted at the DIMAMO surveillance site also supports broader efforts to understand health patterns across African populations.

Although he has not yet supervised students to completion, Ntimane is currently co-supervising seven master's students in the departments of Pathology and Medical Sciences, contributing to the development of future researchers.



IMPROVING LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION THROUGH ANIMAL GENETICS AND INNOVATION

Best Overall Researcher in the University

School of Agriculture and Environmental Science
Faculty of Science and Agriculture



Prof Thobela Tyasi

Improving livestock production is about helping farmers produce more food while preserving the qualities that enable indigenous animals to survive in local conditions. This is according to Professor Thobela Tyasi

As a Full Professor of Animal Breeding and Genetics at the University of Limpopo, he researches how genetics can improve animal growth, body size and egg production. His work examines genetic variation and uses advanced statistics, artificial intelligence and machine learning to improve breeding.

Many indigenous animals are adapted to local environments but have low productivity. Prof Tyasi's research identifies physical and

genetic traits that could improve livestock production, strengthen farmers' livelihoods and contribute to food security.

He also develops community-based breeding programmes that combine scientific knowledge with farmers' indigenous knowledge and breeding priorities.

“What drives me is the opportunity to use science, innovation and indigenous knowledge to address real challenges faced by farmers.”

Prof Tyasi has published more than 200 research articles, presented 49 conference papers and co-authored three book chapters. In 2024, the National Research Foundation awarded him a C2 rating as an

Established Researcher, valid until 2029. That year, he received the South African Society of Animal Science's Best Mid-Career Animal Scientist in South Africa Award.

He was named Best Researcher in the University of Limpopo's Faculty of Science and Agriculture in 2023 and 2025 and received the overall Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award in 2023. He also participated in the Department of Higher Education and Training's Future Professors Programme in 2024-2025.

Prof Tyasi has supervised 60 Honours and fourth-year undergraduate students, 30 master's students and four doctoral students to completion. In 2025, two of his doctoral students received Fulbright Fellowships for specialised training in animal genomics in the United States.

2026 NRF RATED RESEARCHERS



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EXCELLENCE AWARDS



Prof Anthony Minnaar
C2 Rating
Specialisation: Security – Management



Prof Takalani Tshitangana
C2 Rating
Specialisation: Public Health promotion
across the life course



Prof Melitah Rasweswe
C2 Rating
Specialisation:
Women's Reproductive Health



Prof Mapotso Kena
C3 Rating
Specialisation: Agriculture



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EXCELLENCE AWARDS



Prof Mpitloane Hato

C2 Rating

Specialisation: Applied Chemistry -
Membrane Technology



Prof Winston Nxumalo

C2 Rating

Specialisation: Medicinal Chemistry



Prof Irene Ramavhoya

C2 Rating

Specialisation: Maternal Women and
Child Health



Prof Mamare Bopape

C3 Rating

Specialisation: Community Nursing,
Non Communicable Diseases and Child Health



Dr Semakaleng Mpai

Y2 Rating

Specialisation: Food and Medicinal Plants
Metabolomics





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