Issue 160 - 09 October 2026

INSIDE UL newsletter



525 reasons to celebrate: UL's 2026 Spring Graduation honours grit and excellence

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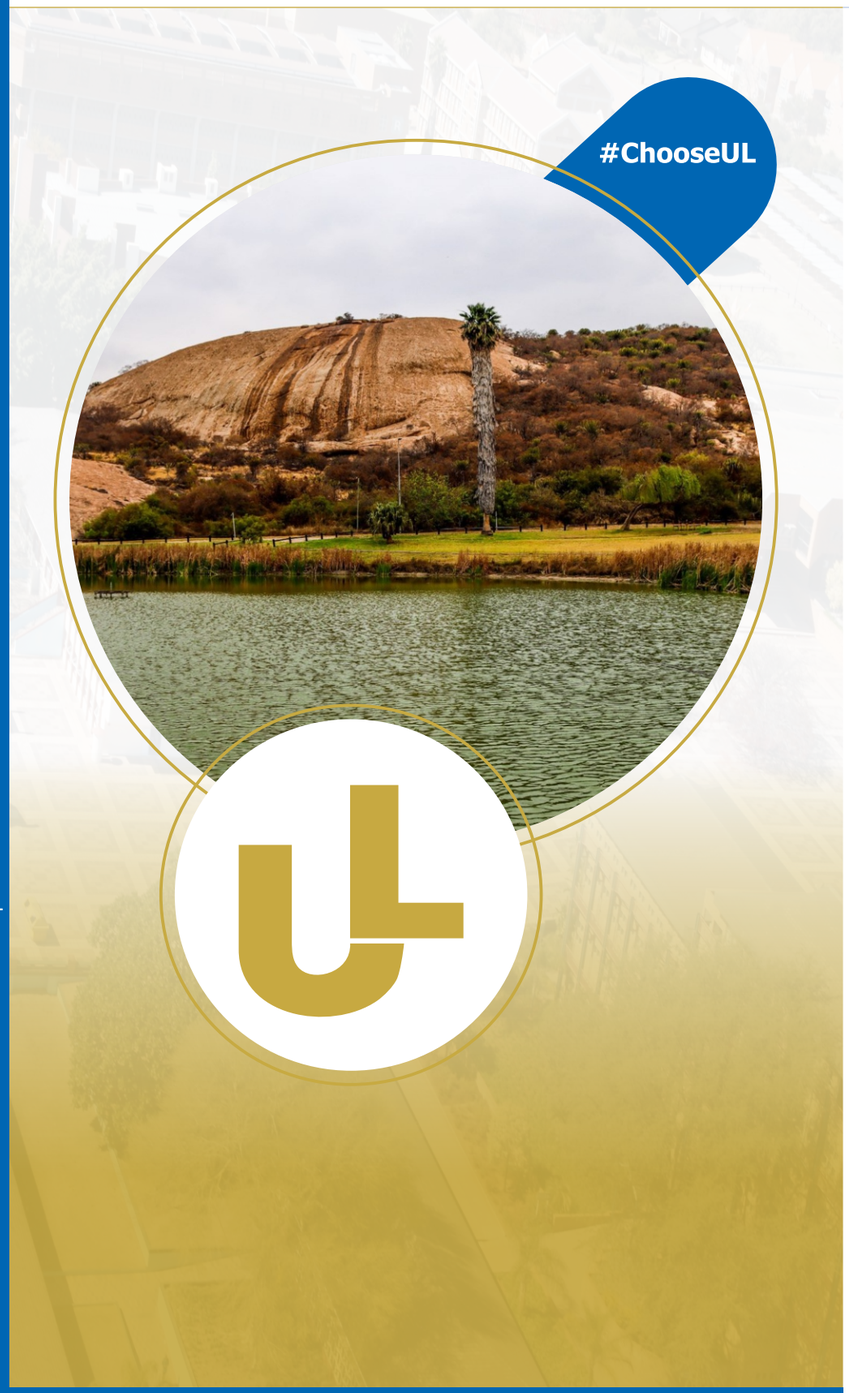
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- THE INSTITUTIONAL FORUM -
as a catalyst for TRANSFORMATION in the higher education sector

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525 reasons to celebrate: UL's 2026 Spring Graduation honours grit and excellenc

Spring Graduation ceremonies showcase academic achievement, research and determination across all four faculties

By Staff reporters – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Graduates celebrate their achievement during the 2026 Spring Graduation Ceremonies.

The University of Limpopo (UL) has conferred 525 qualifications during its 2026 Spring Graduation ceremonies, celebrating the academic achievements of graduates from the faculties of Management and Law, Health Sciences, Humanities, and Science and Agriculture

Held over two days, the ceremonies saw the university confer 261 undergraduate degrees, 15 postgraduate certificates, six postgraduate diplomas, 31 Honours degrees, 186 Master's degrees and 26 doctoral degrees.

Among the graduates was Tokollo Phoshoko, who obtained a Master of Science in Mathematics cum laude.

Her achievement marked a remarkable academic turnaround. After obtaining a Level 1 in Mathematics at high school, she went on to graduate cum laude in both her Honours and Master's degrees.

Phoshoko attributed her success to perseverance, faith and determination, encouraging other students to continue working towards their goals despite setbacks.

In the Faculty of Health Sciences, Dr Clement Premjith received a Master of Medicine in Internal Medicine.

Reflecting on the demands of medical training, Dr Premjith spoke about the responsibility of serving communities and urged fellow graduates to remain curious and approach their work with excellence and compassion.

In the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, Dr Christinah Mkhonto graduated with a PhD in Physics.

Her research, Phase Stability and Surface Interaction of Fe-Alloys, examined the stability and surface properties of metal-doped alloys, with a focus on the brittleness and low-temperature ductility of iron-aluminides.

Her work identified promising compositions and surface structures with potential applications in advanced steel and protective components.

Dr Mkhonto's academic record includes 13 research papers presented at national and international conferences, four awards and recognition through the Prestigious L'Oréal-UNESCO National Young Talent Award for Women in Science.

Dr Mxolisi Ngwenya was awarded a PhD in Nursing for research focused on strengthening triage practices in labour wards at selected district hospitals in Mpumalanga.

His research informed the development and validation of an Obstetric Triage App, designed to support maternal and newborn care.
Dr Ngwenya has also contributed to international journal publications, a book chapter and a policy brief, with his research presented in Denmark, Indonesia and South Africa.

Dr Rosinah Pillay, Head of the Department of Public Administration at UL, received her Doctor of Administration qualification.

Her thesis examined the implementation of an integrated rapid public transport system in Polokwane Local Municipality.

Dr Pillay credited her faith, family and friends for their support and encouraged others to remain committed to their goals.

For Mnikelo Mathebula, who graduated with a BA in Psychology and Criminology, reaching the graduation stage meant overcoming significant financial and academic challenges.

During his first two years at university, he struggled to afford basic necessities while keeping up with his studies. Prayer, faith and fellowship helped him through the difficult period.

In his final year, Mathebula received bursary funding after two unsuccessful applications.

Professor Marlise van Staden, Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Partnerships at UL, encouraged the graduates to take the knowledge, skills and values gained at the university into their communities and workplaces and use them to create meaningful change.

"Carry forward the knowledge, skills and values gained at the University of Limpopo and use them to create meaningful change," said Prof van Staden.

"Carry forward the knowledge, skills and values gained at the University of Limpopo and use them to create meaningful change."

Nine years, three failed attempts and one unforgettable graduation

Molatela Mphago's path to a University of Limpopo degree was marked by academic setbacks, financial hardship, a failed module, and moments when she nearly gave up — but she refused to let go of her dream

By David Mmatli - mabogo.mmatli@ul.ac.za



Photo
Frans Nkhapele

Nine years later, Molatela finally takes her place among UL graduates.

What was supposed to be a three-year degree became a nine-year test of resilience for Molatela Mphago, from Mankweng, Limpopo

When she enrolled at the University of Limpopo (UL) in 2017 to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Mathematical and Computer Science, with majors in Statistics and Computer Science, she expected to graduate within the prescribed period.

Instead, academic setbacks and financial difficulties delayed her graduation, while watching her classmates move ahead and secure jobs made the experience even harder.

Her biggest obstacle was Statistics. After failing the module three times, Mphago was academically excluded in 2024 and could not register at UL that year. She was required to attend another institution to pass the module. After successfully completing it, she was given an opportunity to return to UL and complete her qualification in 2026.

It was a difficult period, particularly as she watched classmates she had started university with graduate and enter the workplace.

"Seeing others complete their studies while I was still retaking modules was emotionally very hard. I felt like I was stuck and I started to doubt if I would ever finish my degree," she said.

Her academic struggles were compounded by financial hardship.

For the first six years of her studies, Mphago was funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). However, from 2023, she no longer received funding and had to continue her studies without financial support.

She credits her parents for their encouragement, but says her faith became her greatest source of strength during the most difficult moments.

"There were many times when I felt like giving up. What kept me going was the Word of God. I held on to Acts 1:4: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.' That scripture gave me strength," she said. The years she spent at university taught her lessons that went beyond the classroom.

Mphago said the experience showed her that she was more resilient than she had realised and that her worth should not be defined by how long it took her to obtain her degree.

Walking across the stage at the University of Limpopo's 2026 Spring Graduation Ceremony was more than the completion of a qualification. It marked the end of a difficult chapter that had tested her academically, financially and emotionally.

"It means my living dream is now a reality. It means obedience pays off. It means a delayed dream is not a denied dream. It is a moment of closure, victory and gratitude," she said.

With pride, she added: "I am a woman in STEM, and no one can take that from me."

Mphago hopes her experience will encourage students who feel left behind because their studies have not gone according to plan.

"Your timeline is valid. Never compare your Chapter 1 to someone else's Chapter 20. Stay, wait and trust in God. Your finish line is still waiting for you. It doesn't matter how long it takes, as long as you don't quit."

Nine years after enrolling at UL, Mphago can finally call herself a graduate.

Now she hopes to gain practical experience in cybersecurity while seeking employment and plans to pursue an Honours degree in Computer Science.

"Seeing others complete their studies while I was still retaking modules was emotionally very hard. I felt like I was stuck and I started to doubt if I would ever finish my degree."

Don't just remember Tiro, live his values, Dr Sikhakhane tells young South Africans

Senior Counsel Dr Muzi Sikhakhane tells the 11th Onkgopotse Tiro Memorial Lecture at the University of Limpopo that remembering the slain student leader must move beyond history lessons and ceremonial commemorations and apply Tiro's fearless spirit to confront the challenges facing the country today

By Nyeleti Nyathi – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Malatji Monyelegwete,
Lebogang Mathaba & Dimpho Boshomane

Senior Counsel Dr Muzi Sikhakhane delivers the keynote address at the 11th Onkgopotse Tiro Memorial Lecture at UL.

More than fifty years after Onkgopotse Abram Tiro was assassinated by a parcel bomb, Senior Counsel Dr Muzi Sikhakhane has challenged South Africa's young people to move beyond commemorating the student leader and consider what his life, convictions and sacrifice mean for the present generation

Adv Sikhakhane was delivering the keynote address at the 11th Onkgopotse Tiro Memorial Lecture, hosted by the University of Limpopo (UL), under the theme "South Africa at the Crossroads – Invoking the Spirit of Tiro."

Adv Sikhakhane addressed an audience composed of members of the university community, political figures and Tiro's family reflecting on the life of the former student leader whose relentless activism against apartheid education played a foundational role in the rise of the Black Consciousness movement.

Before Dr Sikhakhane began his address, Tiro's brother, Mookami Tiro, challenged him not to simply recount the history surrounding his brother's life, but to teach the audience the essence of who Tiro truly was.

In response, Dr Sikhakhane paid tribute to the Tiro family, describing them as the embodiment of a "revolutionary ethic" rooted in profound personal sacrifice.

Recalling Tiro's words of 29 April 1972, Dr Sikhakhane highlighted his vision of a liberated South Africa:
"Let the Lord be praised, for the day shall come when all shall be free to breathe the air of freedom which is theirs to breathe."

Onkgopotse Tiro's life was tragically cut short on 1 February 1974 when a parcel bomb exploded in Botswana, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire many South Africans.

Dr Sikhakhane emphasised that the assassination represented far more than the tragic death of a single young activist.

"The smithereens into which that parcel bomb turned Onkgopotse Tiro's body were not just smithereens of his body, of his head, of his brain, but smithereens of our dreams of liberation," he noted.

Dr Sikhakhane challenged young people to confront political and social apathy and ask whether their daily actions honour the sacrifices made by those who fought for liberation.

He urged South Africans to stop asking what Tiro would have done if he were alive today. Instead, he said, they should focus on a deeper introspection of asking what Tiro represented and whether the conduct of the present generation honours or betrays that spirit.

Concluding his address, he issued a strong call to revive Black Consciousness, describing it as a crucial "new song of freedom" that could help restore humanity and dignity.

> ***"The smithereens into which that parcel bomb turned Onkgopotse Tiro's body were not just smithereens of his body … but smithereens of our dreams of liberation."***



From left: Mookami Tiro, younger brother of Onkgopotse Tiro; Dr Mosibudi Mangena, former AZAPO President and Minister of Science and Technology; and Reverend Awedzani Nemaukhwe at the 11th Onkgopotse Tiro Memorial Lecture.

The message echoed Mookami Tiro's earlier opening challenge that remembering his brother, the slain activist, should not simply mean repeating historical accounts.

It should also involve understanding the principles that guided his activism and applying them to the pressing challenges facing South Africa today.



UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, speaks at the 11th Onkgopotse Tiro Memorial Lecture.

UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele noted that the memorial lecture came at a critical time when South Africa and black people faced an "existential crisis".

Dr Mabelebele emphasised that the university, guided by its history and mission, holds a distinct responsibility to examine the factors preventing the country from developing a sustainable agenda that serves the majority of South Africans.

Adding youth consciousness perspective from the library sector, Puleng Moshoeu, a librarian at UL, urged young people to look beyond reducing Tiro to a mere historical figure or simply to the name attached to a university building.

"We are here because political liberation begins with consciousness. We are here because we understand that education is inseparable from freedom," Moshoeu said.

Moshoeu stressed that young people have a responsibility to question the material conditions they face, drawing parallels between Tiro's resistance to apartheid education and the challenges confronting students today.

For a final-year LLB student Phuti Mabotha, the lecture offered a different understanding of Tiro's legacy.

"The lecture made me realise that remembering Tiro is not only about knowing his history but understanding the values he stood for. As young people, we have a responsibility to carry those values forward and question the challenges facing our country today," Mabotha reflected.

"Look out for each other": MEC and UL rally students to break the silence on suicide

Limpopo Social Development MEC urges students and communities to recognise signs of distress and start conversations about mental health

By Mikateko Mohlala - ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Molebogeng Ledwaba

Limpopo Social Development MEC Hon Florence Radzilani speaks at the University of Limpopo's Suicide Awareness Day and Gender-Based Violence Programme at Onkgopotse Tiro Hall

Limpopo Social Development MEC Hon Florence Radzilani has called on students and communities to look out for one another and take action when they notice signs of emotional distress

Hon Radzilani was speaking at the University of Limpopo's Suicide Awareness Day and Gender-Based Violence Programme.

"We need to look out for each other, especially when we see someone struggling, so that we can offer support and help prevent suicide," she said.

The programme was held under the theme: "Changing the Narrative on Suicide: Call for Action, Start the Conversation, Break the Stigma, Prioritise Mental Health."

> *"We need to look out for each other, especially when we see someone struggling, so that we can offer support and help prevent suicide."*

It brought together students and university stakeholders to raise awareness about suicide prevention, mental health and gender-based violence.

Hon Radzilani said preventing suicide could not be left to professionals and institutions alone. She stressed the importance of supportive communities where people experiencing emotional difficulties can speak openly and seek help before their situation worsens.

The programme sought to move the conversation beyond awareness by encouraging people to recognise warning signs, have difficult conversations and connect those in need with appropriate support.

Anna Mabina from the Centre for Student Counselling and Development and Abram Chuene from the Student Health and Wellness Centre at UL shared messages of support, highlighting the importance of students seeking help when they are struggling with personal, emotional or mental health challenges.

Their contributions reinforced the role of university support services in providing students with a safe place to talk about their challenges and access assistance.

Prof Shai Nkoana, an associate professor in the Department of Psychology, approached the issue from a research perspective, stressing that everyone has a role to play in supporting people experiencing mental health difficulties.

"You don't have to be a medical professional to help someone dealing with mental health issues," he said.
The programme also featured poetry and drama performances, messages of support, keynote addresses, a question-and-answer session and reflections.

The speakers encouraged students to pay attention to changes in the behaviour of friends, classmates and colleagues, start conversations when they are concerned and encourage those who are struggling to seek professional support.



Speakers call for collective action to prevent suicide during the University of Limpopo's Suicide Awareness Day and Gender-Based Violence Programme.

New hope for men as UL researcher turns traditional knowledge into potential treatment for fatal sexual disease

Professor Mamokone Mahlo is developing herbal gel and tonic prototypes in a bid to tackle *'U wela'*, a little-understood condition traditionally reported among men in Limpopo's Vhembe District

By Reuben Maake - Reuben.maake@ul.ac.za



Photos
Reuben Maake

Prototype formulation samples of Plant A and Plant B, used by Prof Mamokone Mahlo to develop prototype herbal gel and tonic formulations for 'U *wela*'.

For generations, traditional communities have relied on indigenous knowledge and medicinal plants to treat a range of ailments. Now, scientists are turning their attention to 'U wela', a little-understood traditional condition primarily reported among Venda men in Limpopo's Vhembe District, in a bid to scientifically investigate its causes and identify potential treatments

Locally, the condition is believed to have potentially fatal consequences if left untreated, adding urgency to efforts to bring traditional knowledge into the laboratory for scientific testing.

At the centre of the research is Professor Mamokone Mahlo, a C2-rated National Research Foundation Researcher in the Department of Biodiversity at the University of Limpopo (UL).

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She has developed prototype herbal formulations; a gel and a tonic using medicinal plants identified for their potential to treat the condition.

The research is funded by the Technology Innovation Agency, which has provided R890,000 towards the Herbal Formulation for *'U wela'* project.

Prof Mahlo identifies key physical symptoms associated with 'U wela' as weight loss, dry mouth, a prominent vein on the forehead and swelling of the genital area.

"These infections are caused by microorganisms such as bacteria and fungi that occur on the skin or near the mucous membranes of the genital region," she highlighted.

Prof Mahlo's team collected medicinal plants in the Capricorn District. With the assistance of an expert traditional-knowledge collaborator, the plants were identified and subjected to phytochemical, microbiological and pharmacological analyses.

The research has progressed to formulation development, with extracts from two plants, referred to as Plant A and Plant B, used to produce the gel and tonic prototypes. Laboratory tests found that extracts from both plants showed no cytotoxic effects on Vero cells at the concentrations tested.

Further analyses were conducted on the final extracts to assess their biological properties and suitability for formulation.



Prof Mamokone Mahlo works on a prototype gel as part of research into a potential treatment for U wela, a condition traditionally reported among men in Vhembe District, Limpopo.

Although these findings led to the development of the prototype formulations, Prof Mahlo cautioned that the work has not yet yielded a finished treatment. She stated that Plant A and Plant B represent highly promising botanical candidates for discovering and developing innovative therapeutic agents for the treatment of *'U wela'* in humans."

Both the gel and tonic are currently undergoing rigorous efficacy and stability testing. Additional testing will be required before clinical trials can determine their safety and effectiveness in humans.

Furthermore, Prof Mahlo noted that more scientific research into *'U wela'* is essential because information about the condition remains limited and poorly documented in the province.

"Further scientific investigation is needed to better understand the condition and to evaluate the potential use of traditional medicines for its management and treatment," she said.

If the formulations are proven safe and effective and receive the necessary intellectual property protection, Prof Mahlo plans to commercialise the gel and tonic at an affordable price.

"Further scientific investigation is needed to better understand the condition and to evaluate the potential use of traditional medicines for its management and treatment."

Prof Koma makes case for a better-connected BRICS

Prof Samuel Koma says stronger connectivity among BRICS countries is essential to deepening regional integration, expanding trade and supporting infrastructure development as member states work to address critical infrastructure gaps

By Malatji Monyelegwete – malatji.monyelegwete@ul.ac.za



On screen, Prof Samuel Koma, Director of the School of Economics and Management at UL, participates in a panel discussion on "Cogs, Wheels, and Seas: BRICS and the Connectivity Question" at the 18th BRICS Academic Forum.

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Greater connectivity between BRICS countries could improve trade links, strengthen economic cooperation and create opportunities for infrastructure development, according to the University of Limpopo (UL) School of Economics and Management Director, Prof Samuel Koma

Prof Koma made the remarks recently at the 18th BRICS Academic Forum, held in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

He was a panellist in a discussion titled "Cogs, Wheels, and Seas: BRICS and the Connectivity Question". The discussion explored whether connectivity primarily serves as an economic project or can act as a tool for greater strategic autonomy among BRICS members.

Prof Koma said the issue must be considered against the infrastructure investment gap and deficits facing BRICS countries.

"BRICS connectivity is a necessary condition to propel regional integration and promote intra-BRICS economic cooperation and trade," he remarked.

He described BRICS connectivity as an economic project aimed at facilitating trade, infrastructure development and cooperation among member states.

"In my view, the issue of BRICS connectivity, which has remained on top of the agenda of BRICS countries for several years, is an economic project, which is centred on driving trade, infrastructure development, and enhancing economic cooperation," he said.

He said improved connectivity would enable BRICS countries to transport goods and people more efficiently through ports, rail networks and maritime routes.

Achieving this goal, however, would demand substantial investment from the private sector, particularly through public-private partnerships that bring together capital, technical expertise, skills and other resources.

Prof Koma also highlighted the crucial role of development finance institutions in supporting cross-border infrastructure projects. He cited the New Development Bank, the African Development Bank and other development finance institutions as key potential sources of financing.

The forum brought together academics, researchers and experts from across BRICS member countries to discuss shared development challenges and develop policy recommendations for consideration by the bloc's political leadership.

"BRICS connectivity is a necessary condition to propel regional integration and promote intra-BRICS economic cooperation and trade."

UL and THERO Services open workplace doors

Three-year deal gives students access to work experience, training, mentorship and career opportunities

By Reuben Maake – reuben.maake@ul.ac.za



Photos
Reuben Maake

From left, Dr Izelque Botha, Head of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at UL; Olga Mulaudzi, Director at THERO Services; Prof Leseilane Mampuru, Acting Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at UL; and Emily Maseko of THERO Services during the launch of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UL and THERO Services, aimed at enhancing students' skills and workplace readiness.

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University of Limpopo (UL) students are set to gain workplace experience through a three-year partnership between the university and THERO Services, an environmental, occupational health and safety, infrastructure compliance, and social sustainability consulting firm

The recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will provide students and graduates in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at UL, with opportunities for work-integrated learning, workplace exposure, mentorship, professional training, workshops and masterclasses.

Dr Izelque Botha, Head of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at UL, said the partnership comes at a time when universities are seeking stronger links with industry to ensure graduates are better prepared for the demands of the workplace.

"Universities need meaningful engagement with industry to ensure that our graduates are better prepared for the demands of the workplace," Botha said.

Prof Leseilane Mampuru, Acting Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at UL, said the partnership would give students practical experience and strengthen the link between teaching and the workplace.

"It will ensure that teaching and learning in geography and environmental studies is bridged through innovative approaches," Prof Mampuru said.

THERO Services is a black woman-owned South African consulting firm making strides in the field of infrastructure planning and implementation.

Olga Mulaudzi, Director of THERO Services, said the partnership would bring academic knowledge and industry experience together.

"The university environment develops knowledge, research, academic excellence, critical thinking and specialist capability. Industry brings practical project experience, market knowledge, implementation insight, professional standards and exposure to real operating environments," she said.

The partnership has already moved beyond the signing ceremony, with THERO Services engaging students on available workplace opportunities. Students were also given advice on applications, interview techniques, social skills and career opportunities.

"THERO Services challenges you to strive to be above average in terms of work output; we are recruiting top students because we operate in a competitive industry and we cannot compromise the standards," Mulaudzi told the students.

The partnership will also create opportunities for knowledge exchange, professional development and community engagement.

The partnership comes at a time when universities are seeking stronger links with industry to ensure graduates are better prepared for the demands of the workplace.

Planting the seeds of food security: UL takes Arbor Week to Mankweng community

Agriculture students and lecturers bring planting skills and agricultural knowledge to schools and a community centre, encouraging young learners and residents to grow food and care for the environment

By Phuti Semenya – ulpublications@ul.ac.za









Photos
Malatji Monyelegwete

Arbor Week in action as community members learn from UL experts how to plant vegetables and trees while promoting environmental care.

As part of its community engagement efforts, the University of Limpopo (UL) took its Arbor Week campaign into the Mankweng community, where students and lecturers shared agricultural knowledge and practical planting skills with schools and community centres

The programme was led by the Department of Plant Production, Soil Science and Agricultural Engineering (PSAE) as part of the 2026 National Arbor Week, held under the theme "My Tree, My Oxygen Plant Yours Today".

The programme was designed to equip young learners and community members with practical food growing skills while giving UL students an opportunity to apply what they learn at the university in real community settings.

The outreach activities from UL were coordinated by Dr Vusi Mbanjwa and Kgashane Malatji, with Ndivhuho Mutshekwa and Edward Mathebula serving as facilitators.

"We took the knowledge beyond the classroom, giving learners and community members practical skills to grow food and care for their environment," Dr Mbanjwa noted.

At Mphome Primary School, learners worked alongside UL students in practical planting activities under the leadership of Principal Malahlela Mashilo.

The school received a variety of crops and trees including onions, spinach (mochaina), mangoes, orange and beetroot.

Principal Mashilo expressed gratitude to the university for bringing the programme to the school, highlighting that the plants would provide long term benefits to both the school and the surrounding community.

The programme also reached other schools in the Mankweng area, engaging learners in similar agricultural activities. The sessions introduced them to fundamentals of food production and demonstrated how available land can be used to grow vegetables and other crops.

At Kgokagano Pre-School & Crèche, Principal Johanna Ramepedi welcomed the initiative and expressed appreciation to UL for selecting the institution to participate in the outreach.

Noting that the university had supported the crèche previously, she praised the team for returning to give back to the community through this year's programme.



University of Limpopo staff members present trees to Emily Mamabolo, Manager of Paledi Multipurpose Community Centre, for planting at the centre as part of efforts to promote environmental care and sustainability.

The crèche received lettuce, mangoes, oranges, spinach, beetroot and onions. The planting activities introduced young children to growing food and encouraged an interest in agriculture from an early age.

The outreach programme subsequently moved to Paledi Multipurpose Community Centre, managed by Emily Mamabolo, where UL staff and students planted trees and vegetables.

Mamabolo welcomed the initiative, saying "the vegetables would benefit the centre and people in the surrounding community."

She said some of the produce could be used at the centre, while surplus vegetables could be sold to community members to generate resources.

These Arbor Week activities formed part of UL's community engagement efforts, giving students an opportunity to apply their agricultural training while sharing practical knowledge with learners and community members on planting, food production and environmental care

"We took the knowledge beyond the classroom, giving learners and community members practical skills to grow food and care for their environment."

Spring Lectures tackle challenges in education, language, AI and gender

More than 150 postgraduate students and researchers presented studies examining problems in South African classrooms, universities and communities at the Faculty of Humanities Spring Lectures

By Jostinah Mamabolo & Lesego Maaba – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Frans Nkhapele

Researchers and postgraduate students came together to present their work during the 2026 University of Limpopo Faculty of Humanities Spring Lectures, examining societal challenges affecting people's everyday lives.

The University of Limpopo's Faculty of Humanities Spring Lectures have become a platform for researchers to examine some of the problems facing South African society, ranging from teacher wellbeing and language barriers to artificial intelligence, women's access to leadership and female-perpetrated violent crime

More than 150 postgraduate students and researchers showcased their work during the two-day 2026 Spring Lectures, which were held under the theme "Africa's New Solutions for Old Global Problems: Re-thinking Teaching and Learning, Research, and Community Engagement in an AI Era." The studies ranged from research still in progress to completed projects, but a common thread ran through many of them: exploring the persistent gap between official policies, institutional practices and the realities experienced by people on the ground.

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Professor Stephen Malatji, Research Professor in the Faculty of Humanities at UL, noted that the Spring Lectures provide postgraduate students with an opportunity to showcase their research and engage in robust discussions with researchers from UL and other institutions.

The programme also featured keynote addresses from scholars who urged students to ensure that their research responds to real world societal challenges.



Executive Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at UL, Prof Satsope Maoto, reaffirmed the Faculty's commitment to developing African solutions to longstanding problems.



Professor Ntsoaki Malebo, Dean of the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at the Central University of Technology.



Professor Tandekayi Henry Gadaga, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) and Associate Professor of Food Science at the University of Eswatini, highlighted opportunities presented by emerging technologies and called on academic institutions to harness artificial intelligence to enhance teaching, improve learning experiences and streamline academic processes.

Professor Ntsoaki Malebo, Dean of the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at the Central University of Technology, encouraged undergraduate students to "take part in volunteering and community service to gain a better understanding of the problems facing communities before pursuing further studies and research."

Among the presentations was a study presented was Beverly Mpyana, examining the intense pressures faced by teachers in four secondary schools in the Mankweng Circuit.

Mpyana, a Master's in Education graduate, affiliated with the DSI-NRF SARChI Research Chair: Schools as Enabling Environments, in his study found that heavy workloads, learner misbehaviour, school violence, strained relationships with colleagues and parents, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate resources were placing teachers under significant pressure.

The study also exposed a gap between policies that acknowledge teacher wellbeing and the actual support structures available in schools. "Teachers reported limited access to on-site counsellors and social workers, while district psychologists typically brought in only when serious problems arose."

To address the challenges, Mpyana recommends expanding access to psychosocial services, reduced administrative workloads, manageable class sizes, stress-management training and better recognition of teachers' work. "Individual grit is not a substitute for systemic backing," she noted.

Language barriers emerged as another recurring concern.

Keabetswe Magagane, a Master student in English Studies, School of Languages and Communication Studies presented research on how English grammar can affect students studying mathematics. His preliminary findings suggest that unfamiliar vocabulary, specialised mathematical terminology and complex sentence structures can make it difficult for students to understand mathematical questions.

"A student may understand mathematics but struggle to demonstrate that knowledge because of the way a question is worded," said Magagane.

To mitigate the challenges, Magagane recommends that lecturers explicitly explain specialised terminology, unpack complex questions and work with language and academic literacy specialists to help students navigate mathematical language.

The mismatch may lead to difficulty with formal Sepedi, standard vocabulary and orthography, as well as a lack of confidence during oral assessments.

Shifting the focus to higher education, Phineus Makina a Masters student in the Department of Linguistics, Translation and Interpreting, School of Languages and Communication studies, is examining another challenge facing universities: how academic literacy should change as artificial intelligence becomes increasingly common in higher education.

His concern is that over-reliance on AI could weaken students' ability to develop arguments, solve problems and work independently. He recommends teaching students to critically interrogate AI-generated information, verify it against credible sources and acknowledge its use where required.

Makina also calls for clear institutional policies, specialised staff training and changes to curriculum so that students are judged not only on their final written work but also on their reasoning, reflection and intellectual engagement.

Gender and criminal justice also featured in the research. Tshephang Fothane, a Master student in Sociology, School of Social Sciences presented research on the systematic barriers preventing women from advancing in political leadership. Her study identified gender bias, patriarchal practices, limited opportunities and social expectations as continuing obstacles.

To foster greater inclusion, she recommends stricter implementation of gender-equality policies, mentorship, improved workplace cultures and meaningful opportunities for women to participate in decision-making.

Noko Mokadi, a Master's candidate in Criminology and Criminal Justice, School of Social Sciences, examined female-perpetrated violent crime and its implications for gender-responsive policing.

Her research challenges the tendency and narrative that casts women only as victims and calls for gender responsive policing that recognises gender without becoming gender biased. She recommends specialised police training, evidence-based investigative guidelines and better data on female-perpetrated violence.

"Take part in volunteering and community service to gain a better understanding of the problems facing communities before pursuing further studies and research."



UL health research targets Limpopo's most pressing health challenges

University of Limpopo advocates for an evidence-based approach to improve healthcare, address inequalities and occupational risks

By Jostinah Mamabolo, Phishego Mohubedu and Rose Matimbe – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Temosho Shokane &
Lebogang Mathaba

Veteran researchers who guided emerging researchers during the Faculty of Health Sciences' 9th Annual Research Day, which called for more inclusive research and solutions that address challenges affecting people in their daily lives.

Steadfast in finding solutions for Africa, the University of Limpopo is turning its research towards some of the health challenges facing communities, from iron deficiency and tuberculosis to occupational hazards, mental health and the difficulties faced by patients living with chronic conditions

These issues were among those explored at the Faculty of Health Sciences 9th Annual Research Day, under the theme "Health Equity and Well-being Across the Lifespan: Leaving No One Behind."

The event brought together postgraduate students, academics and healthcare professionals to present research and discuss ways of responding to health challenges.

A total of 121 abstracts were accepted following peer review, with 112 oral and nine poster presentations.

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The research covered maternal and child health, infectious and non-communicable diseases, mental health, gender equality, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, indigenous health approaches and digital healthcare.

Delivering the keynote address, Professor Olanrewaju Oladimeji, a professor of epidemiology and Head of Doctoral Studies in the Department of Public Health at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, called for health solutions that reflect the realities of underserved communities.

He said researchers, healthcare professionals, policymakers and communities need to work together with target beneficiaries when developing interventions to ensure these solutions resonate with the communities they are intended for.
"The important thing is to co-create," Prof Oladimeji said.

The call for more inclusive research was echoed by Professor Dikeledi Mahlo, a professor of inclusive education at the University of South Africa.

Drawing on her experience of living with a disability after suffering a stroke, Prof Mahlo spoke about the barriers created by inaccessible environments. She argued that people with disabilities should not simply be subjects of research, but should be involved as equal partners.

Professor Daniel Goon, a research professor in UL's Faculty of Health Sciences, told researchers that findings have little value if they are not communicated to the people who can use them.

He encouraged researchers to share their work through journals, conferences, workshops, community engagements and public talks, saying effective dissemination can help bridge the gap between research, practice and policy.

Some of the research presented at the event dealt directly with health problems affecting people in Limpopo.

Katlego Mashao, a Master of Science in Medical Sciences candidate, investigated iron deficiency among patients at Pietersburg Provincial Hospital. Her study analysed 801 patients tested between 2020 and 2024 and found that 14.1% were iron-deficient. Women accounted for 77.9% of those identified with iron deficiency.

The findings point to the need for targeted screening, early diagnosis and appropriate management.

Another study focused on tuberculosis. Kgothatso Rakgate, a PhD candidate in Medical Sciences, examined minority variants associated with drug resistance in Mycobacterium tuberculosis.

His review of 86 studies found that advanced technologies can improve the detection of resistant TB variants that may be missed by routine diagnostic tests. He said that the research further calls for standardised thresholds, longitudinal studies and practical diagnostic approaches to better understand the clinical significance of these variants.
Research by Master of Public Health candidate Kamogelo Moagi examined the occupational and mental health risks faced by farmworkers in Maruleng.

His study highlighted unsafe equipment, exposure to pesticides without adequate protective equipment, anxiety, occupational stress and emotional exhaustion among farmworkers.

Moagi called for regular farm inspections and stronger monitoring of occupational health and safety standards. He plans to pursue a PhD to investigate the health consequences of prolonged pesticide exposure.

Glenrose Manale a junior lecturer in Human Nutrition and Dietetics and a registered dietitian, examined factors affecting dietary intake among patients with chronic kidney disease at Pietersburg Hospital.

Her research found that limited nutrition counselling, food costs, poor appetite, access to nutrition information and long distances travelled for dialysis can make it difficult for patients to follow recommended diets.

She called for regular nutrition counselling, better access to nutrition information and dialysis services that are closer to communities, particularly for patients travelling from Mopani and Vhembe.



Professor Mamare Bopape, Acting Executive Dean of UL's Faculty of Health Sciences, expresses satisfaction with the quality of research papers presented at the Faculty's 9th Annual Research Day.

His review of 86 studies found that advanced technologies can improve the detection of resistant TB variants that may be missed by routine diagnostic tests.

Science and Agriculture researchers turn findings into real-world solutions

From agriculture and climate change to energy and artificial intelligence, postgraduate researchers are tackling challenges facing communities

By Phishego Mohubedu and Phuthi Semenya - ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Dimpho Boshomane, Temosho Shokane and Lebogang Mathaba

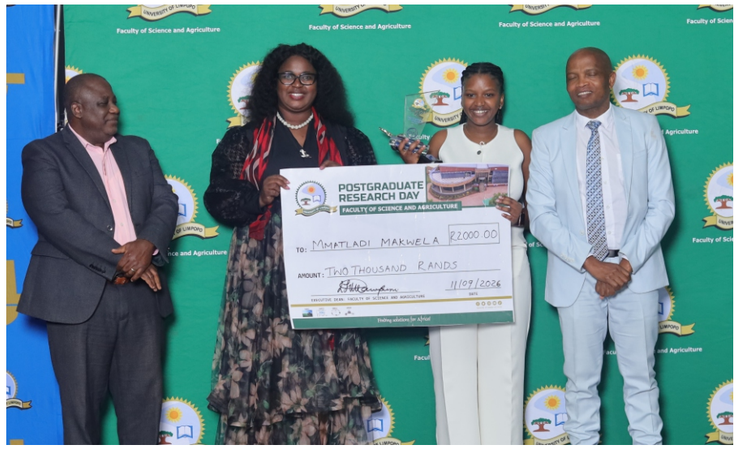
Researchers and postgraduate students at the Faculty of Science and Agriculture's 16th Postgraduate Research Day, held under the theme "Advancing Science Through Research: Translating Innovative Interdisciplinary Research into Impactful Solutions."

The University of Limpopo's Faculty of Science and Agriculture (FSA) is using research to find practical solutions to some of the challenges facing South Africa and the rest of Africa

More than 300 postgraduate students and academics took part in the Faculty's 16th Postgraduate Research Day, held under the theme "Advancing Science Through Research: Translating Innovative Interdisciplinary Research into Impactful Solutions."

The event provided postgraduate researchers with an opportunity to present their work in areas including agriculture, climate change, energy, artificial intelligence and education.

"We need to translate laboratory findings into practical solutions that can benefit policymakers, industries, communities and economic development."



Final-year BSc Honours in Animal Production student Mmatladi Makwela (third from left) was recognised as the best researcher in her category.

In her study that focused on livestock farming research, Mmatladi Makwela, a final-year BSc Honours in Animal Production student, compared Savanna and Kalahari Red goats to help farmers make informed decisions when selecting breeds for meat production.

Based on her findings, Makwela recommended the Kalahari Red goat to farmers interested in goat meat production, which she touts for better yields and meat quality.

Raisibe Mahlo, a Master of Science in Animal Production student, focused on South African dairy cattle genetics. She used genomic information to examine South African smallholder dairy crossbred cattle. Her research identified genetic regions linked to milk production, milk composition and adaptability, which could support future breeding programmes.

The Research Day also looked at energy and battery technology. Samson Singo, a Master of Science in Physics student, investigated whether doping silicon with carbon, nitrogen and fluorine could improve the properties of silicon-based anodes used in lithium-ion batteries.

His research provides information that could help guide the development of improved battery materials while reducing the time and cost of experimental testing.

In computer science, Mathews Tladi, a Master of Computer Science student, explored the use of synthetic data to improve a large language model's ability to understand and answer questions in Sepedi.

His research responds to the limited representation of African languages in artificial intelligence and seeks to improve access to technology for African language speakers.

Professor Hector Chikoore, Professor of Climatology at UL, demonstrated how climate data, forecasting models and flood-risk maps can help authorities identify areas at risk before disasters occur. He also stressed that scientific information must reach communities in a form they can understand and use.

According to Prof Leseilane Mampuru, Acting Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, the quality of the research papers and findings presented showed the value of bringing different fields of study together.

He said the theme of the Research Day was a reminder that complex scientific and environmental challenges cannot be addressed by one discipline alone.

"We must actively work to move our laboratory data out into the world. By doing so, we turn raw insights into practical tools that benefit policymakers, industries and economic development within our communities," said Prof Mampuru.



Prof Peter Masoko, Research Professor, Faculty of Science and Agriculture, University of Limpopo.

Faculty Research Professor Peter Masoko stressed the importance of turning research findings into solutions that can be used outside the university.

"We need to translate laboratory findings into practical solutions that can benefit policymakers, industries, communities and impact economic growth," said Prof Masoko.



Finding solutions for Africa

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