history of the turfloop graduate school of leadership

This brief history of the TGSL only allows reflection on the origins and guiding spirit of this remarkable institution.

It is a startling fact that the founders of EduPark were accused of stealing EduPark and its various Development Facilitation and Training Institute (DevFTI) programmes from the University of the North. At one point, Mail & Guardian posters, displayed in all the large cities across South Africa, accused the then Vice-Chancellor, Prof Njabulo Ndebele, of stealing R19 million from the University of the North. When an assessor for the Department of Education came to investigate, he said it looked like good value for money. Nothing was stolen, but new and innovative institutions came into being at EduPark.

EduPark was to be a new beginning for the university. It was a conscious attempt to create a centre for educational excellence in the Province. Innovative educational programmes were to be presented by various educational institutions, including the University of the North. EduPark and the programmes that developed there were run on an economically sustainable basis. The overall purpose was to provide innovative ways of both empowering and accrediting people who were already working in their fields.

During 1996 Prof Ndebele signed MOUs with Baruch College and the New School for Social Research in New York City. Baruch was supposed to help the University of the North develop a Business School and the New School was to transfer its NGO training workshops to the University of the North. The Business School partnership fizzled out after it was realised that Baruch's operational plan was inappropriate for our context – it being based on American experience and input and that this would be more costly than the funds available to us. The New School partnership did, however, lead to the development of DevFTI. In addition, intensive research of the market showed that besides a Master of Development programme, both a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Public Administration would be viable.

But EduPark was merely a venue. The Faculty of Management Sciences recognised that innovative, indigenous and appropriate knowledge, understanding, strategies, policies and techniques were needed for the development challenges facing the new South African democracy. Utilising the funds provided by the New School in New York, the first South African NGO training workshop was held in 1997. This workshop impressed the funders, the Rockefeller, Mott and Ford Foundations, who provided the university with sufficient funds to run these workshops and others as well as to develop the Master’s programme in Development (MDEV). At the same time, DevFTI was able also to fund the groundwork for the development of the MBA and MPA programmes.

In these early years the DevFTI programmes attracted participants from Limpopo, East and Northern Cape, Mpmalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique, Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. One of the first graduates of the MDEV programme was a woman from Kenya.

The structure of the Graduate School was approved on the basis that there would be no posts attached to it until it had proved its viability and on condition that it would become sustainable within two years. The Graduate School was profitable in its first year through the large intake of students into the MDEV programme, even though the MBA and MPA programmes, conducted in partnership with the University of Pretoria, took another year to become profitable.

Since the beginning of the Graduate School of Leadership, the Faculty of Management Sciences (now incorporated into the Faculty of Management and Law) has played a significant role in its development and implementation.

Driving the concept was the belief that given a facilitative, supportive and co-operative milieu people would develop the appropriate skills, experience and confidence to bring about the harnessing of our rich potential in human, financial and related resources.
The Graduate School incorporated the brand Turfloop to become the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership, building on the fact that the university had been the alma mater of many of the leaders of the new South Africa. The idea of a Business School was rejected in favour of the more developmentally oriented School of Leadership for the private, public and civil sectors. From its conception, the establishment of the TGSL was a team effort of participation, contribution, commitment, dedication, sharing, creation and the transfer of skills.

While the University of the North teetered on the edge of crises, the TGSL programmes were steaming ahead, building capacity and linkages in the Southern African region. These initiatives, some of which were unique in the South African context, resisted being sucked into the paranoia and distrust that characterised the main campus during the late 1990s and early 2000s. In fact, it is likely that these initiatives helped the main campus to find a more positive direction.