

# CUT ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

2025 AUTUMN GRADUATION SPECIAL EDITION



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# Foreword



Dear CUT Alumni and Friends

As the leaves change colour and the autumn air settles over our campuses, we are once again reminded of the powerful cycle of access, success, and transformation that defines the Central University of Technology, Free State. This special Autumn Graduation Edition of the CUT Alumni Newsletter celebrates not only the academic achievements of our newest graduates but also the enduring spirit of excellence that unites us all as members of the CUT family.

Graduation is a significant milestone - a testament to hard work, persistence, and the relentless pursuit of knowledge. For our graduates, it marks the start of new journeys, full of opportunities and responsibilities. For our alumni community, it's a time for reflection and pride, knowing that the legacy of CUT continues to thrive through the accomplishments of those who follow in your footsteps.

In this edition, we invite you to celebrate with us. Discover stories of success, messages of inspiration, and glimpses into the future of CUT. More than ever, we are committed to strengthening the connections within our alumni network, fostering a culture of engagement, giving, and goodwill.

To our graduates - welcome to the expanding global community of CUT alumni. To our alumni - thank you for continuing to shine a light for those who come after you.

Warm Regards,

Qondakele Sompondo  
Director: Institutional Advancement  
Central University of Technology, Free State

# Editorial note



Celebrating the Autumn 2025 Graduates

Dear Alum

This special edition is dedicated to the journey of our 2025 Autumn Graduates, not just the moment they stepped across the stage, but everything that brought them there. It is about the long hours, the hard work, the determination, the support from loved ones, the small victories, the moments of growth that shaped their path and made the big ones possible.

Inside this edition, we celebrate the spirit of graduation - joy, pride, and unforgettable moments. From the excitement of the formal ceremonies to the elegance of the Doctorandi Dinner, we honour the display of success and excellence in all its forms.

We are proud to feature stories of standout graduates whose paths reflect more than academic achievement, including resilient students uplifted by the Disability Unit, and young alumni who are already making an impact in their industries and communities as part of the growing CUT network.

We highlight the impactful story of Dr Ipeleng Kgosiemang whose PhD journey is a moving testament to perseverance, passion and purpose. We also celebrate the inspiring journey of Prof. Tumo Kele that displays both personal excellence and a commitment to lifelong learning as well as Dr Izel van Heerden's odyssey that reminds us that when creativity meets compassion, design becomes a powerful force for healing.

Every name called on stage reflects more than a personal achievement. It represents the shared efforts made by loved ones, mentors, lecturers, support staff, and peers who helped make it all possible. While graduation marks the end of one chapter, it also opens the door to many new ones still to be written.

To our graduates, well done! Together, we celebrate with you, and we believe in your journey ahead.

Warm regards

Jacqueline Pietersen  
Deputy Director: Alumni Affairs  
Department of Institutional Advancement



# 2025 CUT AUTUMN GRADUATIONS





# 2025 Central University of Technology, Free State Autumn Graduations - A celebration of milestones and new beginnings



The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) proudly hosted its 2025 autumn graduation ceremonies from 19 to 27 March 2025. These ceremonies marked a significant moment in CUT's academic calendar, and were filled with joy, reflection and inspiration.

This year also marked a historic first for the Welkom Campus, which hosted its graduation ceremony in the newly inaugurated Multipurpose Hall. This development symbolises the university's ongoing commitment to investing in infrastructure that enhances student experience and community pride.

A total of 3 715 students graduated, with 2 986 from Bloemfontein Campus, and 729 from the Welkom Campus. Among them were 40 master's degree graduates, 31 from Bloemfontein and 9 from Welkom, as well as 20 doctoral graduates, of whom 17 were conferred in Bloemfontein and 3 in Welkom. An honorary doctoral degree was also conferred. Another highlight of this year's ceremonies was the introduction of CUT's new academic regalia, worn proudly by graduates and academic staff alike. The elegant new design reflects the university's evolving identity, and adds a fresh sense of tradition and formality to the proceedings. The Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof. Pamela Dube, remarked warmly, "Congratulations to all of you, and you all look amazing!"

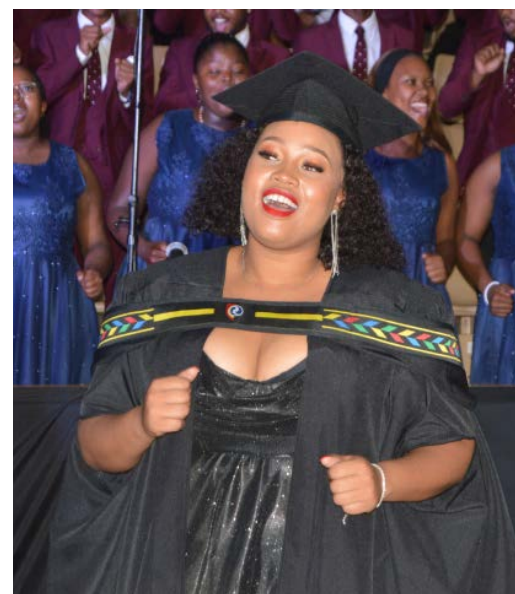
In her official address, Prof. Dube reminded graduates of the significance of their achievement and the depth of personal growth they have undergone. She said, "By virtue of today's occasion and the powers vested in me as Vice-Chancellor, we proudly confirm that you, the graduates, have undergone rigorous refinement and sharpening. Today you are shining crystal, and brimming full of hope and potential." She further inspired the audience with a timeless truth drawn from the book of Job, "The price of wisdom is above rubies."

As CUT continues to grow in national rankings, research output, and global partnerships, these graduation ceremonies reflected more than academic achievements - they embodied the university's mission to empower students who will go on to transform their communities and industries. With confidence in its graduates and a clear vision for the future, CUT reaffirms its position as a leader in technology-driven, socially responsible, education.

Graduation Ceremony: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1Lar1Gd9G5/>

Doctoral Graduates: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1B8Mw9Pryx/>

Honorary Doctorate interview: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1BsDxbgWMh/>





# Prof. Tumo Kele - A mind for numbers, a heart for leadership

In a world increasingly shaped by innovation, data, and complex social challenges, the role of an academic leader has never been more critical. Few embody the transformative power of education and leadership like Prof. Tumo Kele. Born and raised in the Free State, Prof. Kele's early years were steeped in the warmth of family and the grounding values of discipline, humility and resilience. His favourite childhood memories include spending time exploring the outdoors, reading, and engaging with puzzles and numbers – an early indication of the mathematical mind that would later shape his academic career.

"My family played a major role in shaping who I am," he shares. "They taught me that knowledge is powerful, but wisdom lies in how you use it." This foundational belief in purposeful living became a cornerstone of both his personal philosophy and professional ethos. Driven by an early love for numbers and a natural analytical mind, Prof. Kele initially gravitated towards mathematical sciences. His academic path led him to several respected institutions, including the University of the Free State (UFS) and the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), where he completed multiple degrees.

"I was always curious; not just about how things work, but why," he explains. "Academia offered me a platform to ask those questions and build solutions with real-world relevance." The decision to specialise in entrepreneurship and research came as a reflection of his belief in the power of education to catalyse economic and social development. For Prof. Kele, entrepreneurship is not just about starting businesses, it is about cultivating a mindset of innovation, adaptability and problem-solving.

Prof. Kele's background in mathematical sciences and statistics laid a solid foundation for his transition into the world of business and management. His Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences allowed him to integrate analytical precision with strategic thinking – an approach that defines his teaching and research today.

"Mathematics taught me structure and logic, while management taught me vision and systems," he reflects. This blend of disciplines is evident in his ability to lead complex research initiatives, design curriculum, and mentor future business leaders with clarity and purpose. From lecturer in Mathematics to research professor, every role in Prof. Kele's academic career has added a new dimension to his leadership. As Head of Section at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), he navigated institutional challenges, led curriculum reform, and built

academic teams with a shared commitment to excellence. Later, as School Director, he broadened his scope, balancing strategy with compassion and operations with vision. At the helm of the Centre for Business Analytics and Research, Prof. Kele spearheaded projects that brought data-driven decision-making into classrooms and boardrooms alike. His initiatives helped demystify analytics for non-technical audiences, and promoted data literacy across disciplines.

Now a research professor at the Tshwane School for Business and Society, Prof. Kele continues to push the boundaries of innovation in higher education. His focus is clear: to inspire students to think critically, act ethically, and innovate boldly. He champions experiential learning, entrepreneurship incubation, and interdisciplinary research. "I want my students to leave the classroom with confidence, creativity, and a commitment to solving real-world problems," he asserts. Having worked across several institutions, Prof. Kele has developed a leadership style that is both adaptive and principled. He understands that each academic environment is unique, and he approaches each with a deep sense of cultural awareness, emotional intelligence, and strategic clarity. "My leadership style is shaped by listening, really listening, to what people need to thrive. From there, you build trust, create systems, and deliver results," he says.

Prof. Kele envisions an academic landscape that is more inclusive, innovative, and impact driven. He hopes to continue contributing to scholarship, while mentoring a new generation of leaders who will carry forward the values of integrity, excellence, and community engagement. "Ultimately, I want my work to contribute to a more just and informed society. That is what drives me every day," he says. His advice to young scholars is simple yet profound: "Stay curious, stay committed, and never compromise your values."

Juggling research, teaching and leadership is no small feat, but Prof. Kele manages it with admirable poise. He credits this balance to effective time management, a love for what he does, and the support of colleagues and family. Outside of the classroom, he enjoys reading, spending time with family, and engaging in reflective practices that nourish both mind and spirit. In an era where change is the only constant, Prof. Kele stands as a pillar of thoughtful leadership, rigorous scholarship, and compassionate mentorship. His story reminds us that true greatness lies not just in personal success, but also in lifting others as you rise.





# Becoming Dr Ipeleng Kgosiemang - The journey, the struggles, the triumph

Cancer research is often driven by technology and clinical trials, but Dr Kgosiemang is charting a different path, one that reconnects science with ancient knowledge. Her groundbreaking work ties together three powerful elements: indigenous wisdom, nanotechnology and traditional Chinese medicine. At the heart of her research is a belief that some of today's most complex medical challenges can be addressed by blending tradition with innovation, she has risen to become a pioneering researcher in cancer therapy.

Raised by her grandparents and a single mother who prioritised education above all else, Dr Kgosiemang learned the value of hard work early in her life. "We didn't have everything, but we never lacked what we needed for school," she recalls. Her mother's unwavering dedication and the inspiration of a high school science teacher, Mr Laloo, who prophesied her future as "doctor", planted the seeds for her academic ascent.

Her early schooling took place at Manno Primary and Living Faith Primary in Itsoseng, before she completed matric at Mmabatho High School. While academia wasn't always part of her long-term plan. "I simply knew I had to finish tertiary education and find a job," she admits. It was during her first internship after completing a BSc in Microbiology at the University of the Free State (UFS) that she realised routine work wasn't for her.

In pursuit of something greater, she enrolled in Biomedical Technology at the Central University of Technology (CUT). A pivotal moment came when a female lecturer challenged her decision to pursue a second undergraduate degree. That conversation reignited her passion and redirected her path toward the BTech programme, which led to a master's degree (cum laude) at CUT, and a student exchange opportunity in Sweden.

However, the start of her PhD in 2017 marked the beginning of her most testing season. After presenting her research proposal and beginning her work, her initial supervisor left the institution. "I was assigned a new supervisor in 2018, and I had to start the study from scratch, in a field I had no prior knowledge of," she recalls. Despite the steep learning curve and emotional toll, she stayed committed.

Her doctoral study focused on developing a novel cancer treatment model, one that fused indigenous plants, nanoparticles, and Traditional Chinese acupuncture principles for targeted drug delivery. Tested on live animals, her model proved to be more effective and safer than conventional methods, offering groundbreaking implications for cancer therapy, especially in the integration of traditional knowledge systems with nanotechnology.

Her PhD journey was far from linear. "COVID-19 disrupted lab access, and I took a gap year in 2022 after giving birth to my first child," she says. And just as she prepared to submit her thesis, she gave birth to her second child—one of her most difficult personal challenges during her journey. Yet, she never once considered giving up. "I was determined to finish what I had started," she shares.

She finally earned the title "Doctor," and the moment was deeply emotional. "My mom burst into tears, my husband was over the moon and even the village celebrated," she says proudly. As the first PhD holder in her family, the achievement was not only personal but communal. Currently taking a well-earned break from academia to raise her daughter, Dr. Kgosiemang remains connected to research. "Research never really leaves you," she says. She plans to pursue a postdoctoral fellowship and continue contributing to her field.

When asked how she defines success, she said: "Creating impact, using my experience and knowledge to bring about real-world change and uplift others." For those considering the PhD route, she offers grounded advice, "Finish your Master's, gain work experience, and let a real-world gap guide your doctoral study." In one word, she describes her journey as transformational, an evolution that shaped her personally, professionally, and academically.

Dr Kgosiemang's work exemplifies how blending science and tradition can save lives, and how perseverance can rewrite destinies. Her journey is not just inspiring, it is a blueprint for turning obstacles into breakthroughs, it is a beacon of what is possible when grit meets purpose.





# The art of healing - Biomedical design through Dr Izel van Heerden's eyes

Dr Izel van Heerden's story is one of transformation by turning creativity into compassion and design into healing. What began as a career in graphic design evolved into a life-changing journey through biomedical technology, inspired by one vital project that revealed the human impact of innovation. Today, as a Doctor of Health Science in Biomedical Technology, Dr Izel van Heerden stands at the intersection of art, science, and empathy, reshaping lives with every design.

Born and raised in Bloemfontein, she was deeply influenced by the values of discipline, kindness, and service. She attended Jim Fouché Primary School and later Jim Fouché High School, where she discovered her love for learning and creativity. Her school days were filled with inspiring memories, especially from community outreach projects dedicated to hospitals and retirement homes. "I can still recall the smiles on the faces of patients and residents, their eyes lighting up as we shared stories, laughter, and a bit of our youth with them," she reflects. "It was in those small but powerful interactions that I felt a deep sense of connection and purpose."

Initially enrolling for a BTech in Graphic Design at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), Dr van Heerden later completed a master's degree in design, with a strong focus on the medical field. It was during this time that she encountered the project that would change her life - digitally sculpting a prosthetic nose for a patient. "This wasn't just a project, it was a person. A man who had lost part of his face and, with it, a piece of his identity," she shares. "Being part of his journey using my hands,

my knowledge, and my creativity to restore something so personal was humbling. I remember thinking, "This is what I was meant to do."

"Motivated by this newfound purpose, she redirected her academic path toward biomedical technology. She began working with the Centre for Rapid Prototyping and Manufacturing (CRPM), where she participated in the design of breast implants for patients with Poland Syndrome. This work deepened her conviction that design could be a tool for healing. "For the first time, I understood how innovation could give people their confidence back," she says.

Her doctoral research focused on the design and development of facial prosthetics for individuals who had lost parts of their identity due to trauma or illness. One of the most moving aspects of my journey was working with patients who needed facial prostheses," she reflects. "Being able to help someone regain their confidence and dignity to watch their face light up when they looked in the mirror and felt whole again is something I will never forget. Their gratitude was overwhelming, and it reminded me that healing isn't just physical, it's emotional and social too."

However, the journey was not without difficulty. While she anticipated the academic workload, she was unprepared for the systemic and administrative challenges she would face. "The research itself wasn't the hardest part. It was navigating the institution," she admits. Despite the obstacles, she credits her mentors, Professors Annabel Fossey and Kobus van der Walt, for their unwavering belief in her potential. "They were my lifeline. They believed in me even

when I doubted myself." Throughout her journey, family and friends were a vital source of strength. From offering technical support to simply listening during tough moments, their support helped her stay grounded. "This wasn't just an academic journey. It was about human connection," she says. "The love and encouragement I received carried me through." Among her most notable achievements was presenting at the Rapid Product Development Association of South Africa (RAPDASA) Conference and demonstrating her work to Minister Naledi Pandor. Yet, one of the most transformative experiences was witnessing a midface reconstruction surgery in Cape Town, seeing her field in action, where compassion and technology merged to rebuild not just a face, but a life.

Dr Van Heerden also spent a year at Uppsala University in Sweden as part of an exchange programme. Stranded abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic, she faced unexpected solitude and distance from her support system. That period tested her resilience but also shaped her independence. "That year changed me. It was one of the hardest, but also one of the most meaningful chapters of my life," she shares. Today, she is focused on publishing her doctoral work in academic journals, eager to share her findings and inspire others. She also continues to find peace in creative pursuits such as painting and design - reminders of the passion that first led her into this journey. One piece of advice kept her moving forward: "You don't have to be perfect. Just keep going." That mindset helped her embrace imperfection and persist when the pressure felt overwhelming. "Progress isn't always linear. Some days, just showing up is enough."

Reflecting on her journey, she emphasises the importance of balance. "Academic excellence is valuable, but never at the expense of your wellness," she says. "Take care of your mind and body." As for the legacy she hopes to leave, it goes beyond academic titles or

professional accolades. "I want to be remembered as someone who genuinely cared. Someone who made a positive difference."

To fellow students and alumni, especially those walking the halls of CUT, she offers heartfelt advice:

"Choose your supervisor wisely. Pick a research topic that lights a fire inside you. When your work reflects your passion, it becomes more than a degree, it becomes your purpose."





# Simon Sebokolodi - Striking the right chord between discipline and passion

Growing up in Welkom in the Free State, Simon Sebokolodi never imagined he would perform on the piano at his own university graduation one day. Like many young people, his early school years came with moments of uncertainty and a search for direction. He recalls a time when staying motivated academically was a challenge. However, as he matured, Simon began to recognise the importance of education, discipline and determination, lessons that ultimately transformed his path and shaped the man he is today.

He started his education at Welkom Preparatory School and later attended Welkom Technical High School. One moment that stands out from his childhood was when he qualified for the provincial cross-country competition just weeks after recovering from an ankle injury. That experience taught him about determination and pushing past limits, even at a young age.

Family played a huge role in shaping Simon's values. Raised in a home rooted in faith, respect and perseverance, he was introduced to music through church. However, he did not enjoy it at the time. Church music felt like an obligation, not something he connected, with. That is until his matric year, when he joined the school choir for the first time. That unexpected decision opened the door to a passion he never knew he had.

After finishing school in 2018, Simon bought a small keyboard and began teaching himself to play the piano by ear. At first, he had no idea what he was doing, but curiosity kept him going. Eventually, he took it further by getting a private tutor in 2021 who helped him learn to read sheet music and improve his skills. His dream is to become a classical pianist.

Simon enrolled at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) in Welkom, where he studied Human Resources Management. His academic journey was not easy, but it became a personal mission. He was determined to break free from old habits and prove to himself that he could succeed. Through setting clear goals, staying consistent, and dedicating at least two hours each day to studying, he slowly started to transform. He surrounded himself with motivated peers, stayed focused, and committed to taking every assignment seriously, which is something he had never done before. All that effort paid off when he graduated cum laude, a moment he describes as one of the proudest moments in his life.

What made it even more special was being selected to play piano at his own graduation ceremony. Simon's involvement in the CUT Choir began through a connection at church. A friend had invited him to join for vocal training ahead of a competition. Later, after seeing a video of Simon performing with a church choir, the choir chairperson invited him to play piano for the CUT choir. Since then, Simon has become an important part of the choir, finding a strong sense of community and creative fulfilment through the experience.

Simon is currently enrolled in a Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resources Management and is actively seeking job opportunities. His career goal is to work in employee relations, with a focus on conflict resolution and wellness programmes that support a healthy and productive work environment. At the same time, he continues to nurture his love for music, seeing it as a lifelong outlet and possibly even a side career.

Simon says the key to balancing music, academics and life is planning. He sticks to a schedule, makes time for rest, and ensures his energy is well-spent. For him, music is not a distraction, it is therapy. It gives him emotional balance during stressful times and helps him stay grounded.

To other students trying to juggle multiple passions, Simon offers simple advice: "Don't ignore what you love. Make time for it but be realistic and structured. Passion needs discipline to thrive." His message to fellow CUT students and the university community is just as clear: "Your journey is your own. Don't compare yourself to others. Whether you start strong or stumble in the beginning, it's never too late to turn things around."







## No barriers, just detours - A life rewritten by strength

In a world that often underestimates those who navigate life with disabilities, Lindiwe Mothibeli's story shines as a powerful testament to resilience, determination, and the transformative power of support and self-belief.

Born and raised in the Eastern Free State, Lindiwe has lived with a visual impairment from birth. Remarkably, she never attended a special school, but pursued her entire basic education through mainstream institutions. With the unwavering support of her two grandmothers, sister, and a tight-knit community, she completed matric without being treated differently. "I had the most beautiful childhood," she reflects. "If I were to be asked to go back there, I would go back again."

Her academic journey, however, has not been without its trials. After enrolling in a college programme not suited to her visual impairment, she faced systemic challenges and a lack of resources, which had led her to drop out – an experience that plunged her into depression. "That was the first time my disability got in the way of my dreams," she recalls. However, thanks to the intervention of psychologist Prof. Oupa Makola, Lindiwe was encouraged to apply to

the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), where her story took a positive turn.

Since joining CUT in 2019 to pursue a Diploma in Human Resource (HR) Management, Lindiwe has flourished. The university's Disability Unit, supportive lecturers, and fellow students, created an environment where she could thrive academically and emotionally. "I felt like I was back in my basic education years," she says with gratitude. From a struggling dropout to a confident postgraduate student pursuing her National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 8 qualification, Lindiwe is now a mentor at CUT's Disability Unit, helping other differently abled students to find their feet.

Although she initially chose her course for its theoretical focus, hoping to avoid the practical limitations of her previous institution, Lindiwe has grown to love HR Management. She finds that it aligns with her vibrant personality and her passion for working with people. "I'm very talkative and love working with others, so HR suits me perfectly," she laughs.

Beyond her studies, Lindiwe is an advocate for inclusion and

visibility. From participating in campus entrepreneurship events to organising Sign African Sign Language (SASL) awareness campaigns, she ensures that the voices of differently abled students are heard and valued. Yet, she believes more work needs to be done. "I wish institutions could employ more people with disabilities in diverse departments, not just in the Disability Unit."

Her advice to others living with disabilities is both practical and empowering: "First, accept yourself. Know your capabilities and limitations, and don't be afraid to ask for help." For Lindiwe, success is not about denying her disability; it is about embracing it and using it as a platform to prove what is possible.

To parents of differently abled children, her message is clear: "Do not limit your children. Support their dreams. We are not incapable; we are just differently abled."

Lindiwe Mothibeli's journey reminds us that disability is not a roadblock; it is a different route, one that can still lead to greatness when walked with courage, love and support.





# From student to senior developer - Yves Bizumuremyi's journey inspires others to strive for greatness

Born and raised in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yves Bizumuremyi's career is a beacon of inspiration, marked by triumph over adversity. Yves began his educational journey in the Democratic Republic of Congo where he completed his early education. Driven by a passion for technology and a desire to make a difference, he moved to Eswatini to pursue higher education. This move marked the beginning of a transformative journey that would see him become a Swati citizen by naturalisation as well as a respected professional in his field.

Yves graduated with a Master's Degree in Information Technology, specialising in blockchain technology for data security from the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (FEBIT) at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT). "I have always been interested in cybersecurity, and as a software developer, I wanted to understand how to develop secure systems to protect sensitive data and operations. This led me to study advanced topics like blockchain technology for data security. I am also passionate about research and staying informed about new trends and emerging technologies. Additionally, I wanted to upgrade my qualification to remain relevant and competitive in the industry," he elaborates.

His choice of university was influenced by its reputation for academic excellence and strong support systems. "The university's values and strength aligned perfectly with my goals," he explains. While he could not participate in student organisations as a part-time international student, he was actively involved as a coordinator of the Youth from East and Southern Africa within the Focolare Movement, a role that strengthened his sense of service and teamwork. He is also a member of the Institute of Information Technology Professionals South Africa (IITPSA), which helps him stay connected to industry developments and expand his professional network. His academic journey was marked by significant achievements, including being awarded Best Master's Student in the faculty and having two research publications approved. These breakthroughs are testimonial to his hard work and enthusiasm.

Yves's professional journey began with an internship at the Eswatini Civil Aviation Authority (ESWACAA) as an Information Technology (IT) intern, where he has since grown into the role of Senior Software Developer. His family and friends were his foundation. Their prayers, encouragement, practical support and belief in him kept him strong during tough times. "There were moments when things felt overwhelming, but my sense of purpose, the people who believed in me, and my passion for my field always pushed me to keep going," he says warmly.

Looking ahead, Bizumuremyi plans to continue contributing to ESWACAA, applying his knowledge to strengthen systems and drive innovation. He also aims to give back to the community through knowledge sharing, mentoring, and supporting initiatives that build local capacity in IT and cybersecurity. In five years, he envisions himself as a researcher with a PhD, in a senior leadership position, mentoring young professionals, and leading impactful projects.

His advice to current and aspiring students is, "Trust in God, stay disciplined, and be resilient. Regardless of how hard it gets, never give up". He encourages them to seize every learning opportunity and trust that their hard work will yield results. To his fellow graduates, he extends congratulations and encourages them to continue making a positive difference, while expressing gratitude to the university community for their support and guidance.

Yves Bizumuremyi's journey is a powerful reminder of the fact that with perseverance, dedication, and a clear vision, one can change challenges into stepping stones for impactful growth in their field and community.





# Ryan Visagie - Staying true, rising strong

Not every graduate walks across the stage with a story that begins with a grand dream or a lifelong plan. For Ryan Visagie, the road to academic success was not carefully mapped out - it unfolded step-by-step, shaped by lessons, discipline, and determination. Born and raised in Heidedal, Bloemfontein, Ryan has always been someone who sticks close to his roots. He describes himself as a simple, laid-back guy who enjoys working out, gaming, and watching sports and animation. He is a proud product of his community. He attended Brebner Primary School and Brebner High School.

Yet, behind that easy-going personality is a determined individual with two cum laude qualifications - one in his fourth year of Information Technology (IT) and another in Education. "I didn't have a clear plan after high school," Ryan admits. "I just knew I was good with computers, so I decided to study IT." He started his studies at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), where he completed his Diploma and Advanced Diploma in IT. However, his academic journey had its own hurdles. "My second year was a major turning point," he recalls. "It was the first time I ever failed academically. I'd never failed before not even in primary school. It was tough."

Instead of giving up, Ryan made a choice that changed everything. "I realised I had two options - either let that failure break me or let it push me to do better," he says. "I chose to keep going." That resilience paid off. He not only completed his IT qualification but also graduated cum laude in his fourth year. Later, drawn by the stability and long-term opportunities of teaching, he enrolled for a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). This time, he set his sights high from the beginning. "I told myself, 'If I could do it once, I can do it again,'" he says. "I worked hard for it, and I'm proud that I achieved cum laude again."

Ryan credits his success to consistency. His study method? Old-school, but effective. "I rewrite everything by hand," he explains. "It helps me process and really understand the work. I don't just memorise, I make sure I understand it." Outside of his studies, he keeps a balanced lifestyle through physical activity and hobbies. "Staying active helps keep my mind clear." Today, he is a teacher at Heidedal Primary School, right in the community where he grew up. For him, the most meaningful part of the job is being there for the children. "Some might see you as a role model," he says. "You're helping shape their futures. Of course it's not always easy. There's a lot of admin, lesson plans, marking but it's part of the job, and it's worth it."

Looking back on his time at university, Ryan says the biggest lesson he learned was not just about academics, it was about life. "You have to put your needs before your wants," he says. "Handle your responsibilities. First study, finish your assignments then you can relax. And whatever you do, don't leave your work for the last minute. It just adds stress." He also reflects on how much he has grown through his experiences. "I've become stronger mentally," he says. "I can handle pressure better, and I've learned not to let setbacks define me." His proudest achievement? "Being true to myself," he says. "Even if people think you're boring or quiet, stick to who you are. Don't give in to peer pressure. Know your worth and stay the course."

Looking ahead, Ryan is keeping his options open. "I've been studying for a long time, so for now, I'm taking a break. But maybe, just maybe, I'll study further down the line." His advice to students is honest: "You're not here to play. Prioritise your work. Do it early, not at the last minute. That gives you time to refine it. And if you fail, don't give up. Failure feels like the end, but it's only the end, if you let it be. Move forward always." Ryan may have kept a low profile during his studies, but his journey speaks for itself. His story is a reminder that true success is built quietly through persistence, purpose, and showing up for yourself every day.





# Zwelithini Mani’s journey, turning effort into achievement

Zwelithini MacDonald Mani, born in Botshabelo, is living proof that hardship does not have to define one’s future. After losing both parents at a young age, Zweli moved in with his grandmother. The experience of grief and change forced him to grow up quickly, and has shaped the person he is today. “Losing my parents and relocating to my grandmother’s home taught me resilience and self-reliance. It pushed me to adapt, and to value every opportunity that comes my way,” he reflects.

Determined to pursue education, Zweli upgraded his matric results at Motheo College, and completed an N6 in Business Management in 2018. After some time away from studies, a friend encouraged him to apply to the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), where he enrolled for a Diploma in Public Management in 2021. He later earned an Advanced Diploma in the same field, graduating cum laude, and is now pursuing a postgraduate diploma.

His experience at CUT became a turning point in his academic and personal life. Initially uncertain about returning to academics, he found motivation from a lecturer who believed in his potential. “There was one lecturer who challenged me to think critically about public policy. Their belief in me gave me the confidence I lacked at the time,” he says. CUT provided not only academic skills, but also professional and personal growth, which helped Zweli discover his strengths.

While studying, Zweli worked as a Peer Advisor, and juggled several side hustles to support himself financially. “I created structured schedules, and remained disciplined with my time.



Balancing work and studies prepared me well for the real world,” he explains. One of his most meaningful memories was receiving his advanced diploma with distinction at graduation – a moment that validated all his sacrifices and hard work.

In addition to his academic achievements, Zweli’s journey includes embracing his identity within the LGBTQIA+ community. He values authenticity and inclusion, and now works as an intern in the Department of Education under Inclusive Education.

“My parents loved me for who I was before their last breath, and that truth helps me block out negativity. I believe everyone deserves respect and the freedom to be themselves,” he affirms.

Zweli lives by the motto: “Today’s effort is tomorrow’s advantage.” Whether facing grief, financial struggles, or self-doubt, he has always pushed forward. His message to others is one of encouragement: “Your past doesn’t determine your future. Every small step you take is building something greater. Believe in that.”





# Language is power - Kekeletso Matuka's inspiring academic journey

From the small town of Bultfontein to the halls of the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), Kekeletso Matuka has carved out a path that exemplifies passion, perseverance and purpose. A proud linguist and three-time CUT student, Kekeletso is proof that when you embrace your passion and knock on the right doors, the possibilities are endless.

Kekeletso has completed her Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Language Practice and Media Studies, and is now pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Language Practice, with plans to commence with her master's degree next year. Kekeletso is deeply invested in language, not just as a field of study, but also as a transformative tool for social change. "I am all things language," she declares. And her academic and professional journey proves just that.

What began as a curiosity in media studies during high school soon blossomed into a full-blown love affair with language. "I didn't know I'd end up being a language practitioner," she shares. "But I discovered my passion here at CUT, and it's opening doors I never imagined."

Her interest was first sparked by a teacher who saw her potential as a reader and speaker. This encouragement led her to apply for the Diploma in Language Practice and Media Studies – a decision that would define the rest of her journey.

Along her academic journey, she has been recognised with numerous prestigious awards.

These include being named the Top Academic Achiever during her diploma studies and earning membership in the Golden Key International Honour Society, an accolade reserved for the top 15% of students in the Faculty of Humanities.

She has also received recognition from the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, as well as multiple Dean's Awards in the Faculty of Humanities for her excellence in tutoring and academic support.

But beyond the awards, Kekeletso says these achievements gave her something deeper: confidence. "I struggle with imposter syndrome, so these recognitions reminded me that I belong. They confirmed that I am doing good."

As a Student Assistant in CUT's Language Services Unit, Kekeletso works on terminology development and multilingualism initiatives to make learning more accessible, especially for students who do not speak English as a first language. "Language can be a barrier in academia," she explains. "I want to help break that barrier and make learning easier."

She is passionate about the role of language in facilitating communication, and believes that language practitioners are crucial in a multilingual country such as South Africa. "We help people understand each other. That's powerful."

Her advice to current students? Be present, be bold, and be visible. "Attend your lectures. Knock on doors.

Network. Use LinkedIn. Ask for help. Don't wait for opportunities; create them," she urges. She believes in making yourself known for the right reasons, and it is this visibility that has opened so many doors for her.

Kekeletso dreams of becoming a lecturer one day, and her commitment to academia is undeniable. "I love teaching. I love learning. This is my joy." For now, she is focused on completing her postgraduate studies and continuing her work in language development projects that support students across the university.

Describing her journey as "exciting", Kekeletso says the challenges are worth it when you are doing something you love. With her curious, outgoing and reliable personality, and a fierce dedication to her craft, she is not just building a career – she is building a legacy.

To students and alumni alike, her story is a reminder that success is not only about where you come from, but how far you are willing to go, and how loudly you are willing to speak up along the way.





# Celebrating excellence - Doctorandi Dinner honours doctoral graduates



The Doctorandi Dinner, a prestigious biannual event, was held on 27 March 2025 at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT)'s Hotel School in Bloemfontein. This memorable occasion is one of the university's finest traditions, dedicated to celebrating the achievements of its doctoral graduates. This season, 20 doctoral candidates were honoured for their academic success and perseverance.

The evening brought together graduates, faculty and guests in a warm and celebratory atmosphere. In her keynote address, Prof. Pamela Dube, CUT Vice-Chancellor and Principal, expressed her gratitude to all attendees, and congratulated the graduates. "This is an opportunity to mingle and interact with the people in the room, especially the PhD graduates," she said. "Together we will enjoy a delightful evening filled with, hopefully, fun and entertainment."

A special moment of the evening was the recognition of honorary doctorate recipient Dr William Hlakoane. "We would like to honour Dr William Hlakoane. Thank you for accepting our invite and for being here with us today. We would like to thank your family and friends for their sacrifices; they played a huge role towards your success," said Prof. Dube.

In addition to heartfelt speeches and entertainment, each doctoral graduate received special gifts from the Alumni Affairs Office and the Communications and Marketing Section as a token of recognition. This thoughtful gesture served as a reminder of the strong support network behind every graduate and a symbol of their continued connection to the institution as alumni.

The evening was alive with entertainment and guests enjoyed the night's festivities in a laid-back and pleasant atmosphere. Graduates were joined by their families, friends, colleagues and supporters, who had been integral to their academic journey. The smiles, excitement and emotion in the room were a testament to the hard work and sacrifices that led to this proud moment. For the graduates, it was not only a celebration of achievement, but a recognition of the road they had travelled to reach this point.







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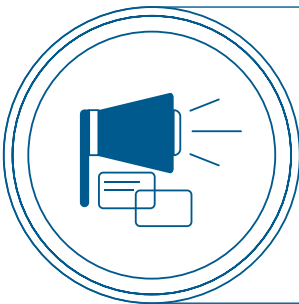
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