



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

UFH NEWS

2024 Autumn Graduation Special Edition



ZK MATTHEWS
GRADUATION CENTENARY
100
years of producing leadership excellence



YOUNG AND DRIVEN

Owami Ngqono, aged 19, was the youngest graduand to be capped at the University of Fort Hare's (UFH) 2024 Autumn Graduation when she collected her Bachelor of Agriculture in Economics degree.

Hailing from Butterworth in the Eastern Cape, Owami entered the gates of the UFH Alice Campus when she was 16, armed with three matric distinctions in Agricultural Science, Maths Literacy, and isiXhosa from Lamplough High School in Butterworth.

She started primary school at the age of five. According to her, she has always been described as the "youngest and brightest" throughout her schooling career by her peers and teachers – a fitting description for the graduand currently pursuing her honours degree.

Despite her tender age, Owami who turns 20 in June, is determined to push the boundaries of achievement, a willpower that she says was formed in her by her maternal grandparents who raised her.

"I grew up in a loving and nurturing home under my grandparents who taught me to seize every opportunity that comes my way, and I have been doing exactly that. The plan now is to pursue a master's degree and hopefully, a doctoral degree."

It was at Lamplough High that the seed to pursue a career in Agriculture was planted in her and nurtured by her high school teacher. "I developed a passion for the field of Agriculture and the science behind it, and fortunately I had a teacher who was willing to support and nurture that passion."

Noting her keenness to pursue a career in agriculture, her teacher pointed her towards Fort Hare. "He advised me that it is the best institution for agricultural studies, and I must say, he was correct."

Entering university, Owami said the transition from high school into tertiary was smooth sailing, "thanks to the friendliness of staff, students and also a relative who was doing her final year when I started my journey year. Over the years, this place has always felt like home. During my time here, I have gained so much valuable knowledge that has empowered me for the industry."

Reflecting on her journey, she expressed gratitude for the support she received from her lecturers, friends and family, including her mother who will also be graduating with her first degree from Walter Sisulu University around May. "My mother has been one of my greatest motivators. Even though she had to put her dream of becoming a qualified accountant on hold several times, she never gave up. Now we will both graduate with our first degrees, one month apart."

The University of Fort Hare is proud to celebrate Owami's remarkable accomplishment and looks forward to witnessing the remarkable contributions she will undoubtedly make in the years to come.

"Thanks to the friendliness of staff, students and also a relative who was doing her final year when I started my journey year. Over the years, this place has always felt like home. During my time here, I have gained so much valuable knowledge that has empowered me for the industry."

DREAM ACHIEVED

Mr Pumelelo Vani, a 68-year-old loving husband and doting grandfather of four from East London, crossed the 2024 Autumn Graduation stage as the most senior graduand to be capped this season.

The retired Walter Sisulu University Lecturer fulfilled his lifelong dream of becoming an alumnus of this esteemed African University as he graduates with a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training with two distinctions.

Fondly known as Pumi, the father of eight, was born in Gqeberha (formerly known as Port Elizabeth) and raised in Mlungisi location in Komani by his aunt and her husband who became his legal guardians following the divorce of his parents and the death of his maternal grandmother when he was seven years old.

Raised in a home to seven children, his journey to this significant achievement has been one of resilience and dedication. "We were raised by parents (guardians) who taught us the value of respect, humbleness, humility and education, and those are values carried me to where I am today."

When he passed matric in 1976 at Ntsonkotha High School in Lady Frere Pumi had the desire to further his education. "However, my aunt who sold fish bread for a living told me that due to financial constraints, matric was the furthest that she could take me. She presented me with a shirt and a tie, signifying that I was ready to enter the workplace."

After matric Pumi was fortunate to secure a job as a clerk at Nessie Knight Hospital in Qumbu in the Eastern Cape. "This was a privileged position at the time. I worked at the stores department where I was responsible for distributing hospital stock and doing the inventory for the hospital."

While working at the hospital, the burning desire to acquire a post-matric qualification was ignited and he enrolled for a Diploma in Office Organisation and Management, a one-year programme in 1978.

He later secured a job at Spoornet, now known as Transnet Freight Rail, where climbed the ranks between 1980 and 2013 from being a booking clerk to serving in various managerial positions, including the Area Manager of Park Station in Johannesburg and then Regional Manager of the Eastern Cape in the division on mainline trains.

All this while, he also climbed the ranks of academia starting with an Advanced Diploma in Business Management, followed by a Bachelor of Business Administration and a BCom Honours degree.

Upon completing his MBA, he joined Walter Sisulu University in 2014 as a lecturer in the Department of Business Management Studies where he played an instrumental role as the chairperson of the Department of Learning and Teaching and later as coordinator of the local governance finance programme.

"When the prerequisite for lecturers to hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training was announced, I instantly knew that I would go to Fort Hare. After all, this is the institution that gave birth to many African leaders. I wanted to be counted among those who stood on the shoulders of those giants produced at Fort Hare."

Pumi who lives with his lovely wife, Nombuyiselo is currently a qualified debt counsellor and in the final stages of acquiring accreditation to open a practice in East London and in Komani.



"I wanted to be counted among those who stood on the shoulders of those giants produced at Fort Hare."



DAY 1

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Click below link to watch a highlights video from the day
[GRADUATION DAY 1](#)



YOUNG NGQELENI WOMAN GRADUATES CUM LAUDE - AN ACHIEVEMENT SHE DEDICATES IN MEMORY OF HER LATE MOTHER AND IN HONOUR OF HER FATHER

When Lulutho Mgweba left her humble village home in Buntingville, Ngqeleni to pursue a degree at the University of Fort Hare (UFH) she set her goal to graduate top of her class. At the Faculty of Management and Commerce 2024 Autumn Graduation ceremony, Lulutho came to realize that goal when she graduated with an Honours Degree in Public Administration, cum laude.

The 24-year-old raised by a single father since she was 11 years old after her mother passed away, said she could not have thought of any better way to pay tribute to her mother's memory and honouring her father than achieving academic excellence.

"I have always told myself that I want to make my late mother, my family and myself proud. I knew that getting an education would bring great honour to our family and as Elin Nordegren once said, 'Education is one thing no one can take away from you.' This degree, and the more to come, is my inheritance."

Lulutho enrolled at UFH in 2020 for her undergrad studies, after she completed a college qualification in Public Relations.

After completing her undergrad, she enrolled for her Honours degree in Public Administration and her pursuit of academic excellence grew more fervent. "I invested my time and efforts towards achieving good marks. Even though I was worried about striking a balance between my research and coursework, I soon mastered it, as such I passed both with good marks."

Her efforts did not go unnoticed, in fact she was lauded for it. "I received an award for being the top achieving student in my honours class. The award was significant because it affirmed that achieving cum laude status was within my grasp."

According to Lulutho, her journey was not one without doubts, but those doubts quickly evaporated when she remembered why she came to university. "I pushed myself because I knew that the one who is in me, is greater than the one who is in the world. Even

though the doubts from others, I told myself that in my weakness, God's strength is always perfect to keep me going and here I am graduating top of my class."

Beaming with pride, Lulutho's 60-year-old father, Mr Daliwonga Worthmond Mgweba, a retired security guard, could not hold back his tears when he spoke about his daughter's achievement. "When my wife passed away, I was left with six children and no steady income. It was a very dark time, but one thing was certain, these children were dependent on me, and only me. In addition to being their father, I had to try and fill the void left by their mother's passing."

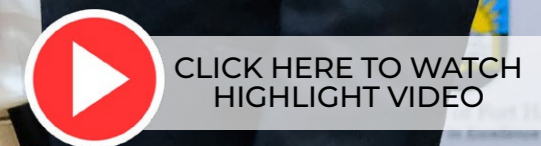
According to Mr Mgweba an ordained preacher, in consoling his family during his wife's burial, one of the village women said that: "This household will one day produce graduates and her words came to manifestation."

Lulutho is the family's second sibling to graduate from Fort Hare. Last year she and her sister, Zetu Mgweba graduated from their undergrad studies in Public Admin.

"I would like to thank the University of Fort Hare for playing an integral role in realizing both my daughters' dreams. They went to Fort Hare and came back successfully, holding exactly what they came here to achieve," said Mr Mgweba.

In advising young rural girls and boys with similar aspirations, Lulutho reminded them that: "A disadvantaged background should not determine how far you can go. What your parents did for a living, or having no parents, where you grew up or where you went to school, shouldn't affect your chances in life."

The day after crossing the graduation stage, Lulutho got onto a bus to complete her new journey - a Master of Public Administration degree at Stellenbosch University.



"I have always told myself that I want to make my late mother, my family and myself proud. I knew that getting an education would bring great honour to our family and as Elin Nordegren once said, 'Education is one thing no one can take away from you.' This degree, and the more to come, is my inheritance."



“I then recalled what the panel told me during my interview for this position. They reminded me that I was applying to work for a university, and should I get the job, I should take the opportunity to empower myself through education.”

UFH SECURITY GUARD GRADUATES WITH HONOURS DEGREE

On 23 April 2024, Mr. Mpumelelo Pinini was not at his usual post at the University of Fort Hare’s (UFH) De Beers Art Gallery on the Alice campus where he works as a security guard; he was at the University’s Sports Complex, graduating with a BCom Honours Degree in Development Studies.

The 52-year-old from Ngwenya Location in Xesi (Middledrift) has been safeguarding the University’s precious buildings, such as the Great Hall and the Sports Complex, since 2010, first temporarily until he was formally employed in 2013 following a successful application.

He was then moved to the De Beers Art Gallery, a move that would inspire him to revisit a dream he had in 1989 when he passed matric, of acquiring a university degree.

“When I entered the Art Gallery and saw the posters on the walls of people such as Prof ZK Matthews, the first graduate of the University, and Gertrude Ntlabathi, who was the first female to graduate at Fort Hare, I got inspired.”

“I then recalled what the panel told me during my interview for this position. They reminded me that I was applying to work for a university, and should I get the job, I should take the opportunity to empower myself through education.”

Heeding the words of his interviewers and the inspiration drawn from the stories of ZK Matthews and Gertrude Ntlabathi, Mr. Pinini decided to apply for his undergraduate degree in 2017, at 45.

“I knew it was not going to be an easy journey but one worth undertaking.”

In 2021, after years of juggling work shifts, his family, which includes his wife and four children, and his studies, Mr. Pinini graduated with his first degree, a Bachelor of Administration in Public Administration.

“I work in Alice, my classes were at the Bisho Campus where the Public Administration Department is located, and I live in Xesi. I had to commute between these three places; this meant leaving home in the wee hours of the morning to make my shift, then take a shuttle to attend class in the afternoons, and returning home after dark.”

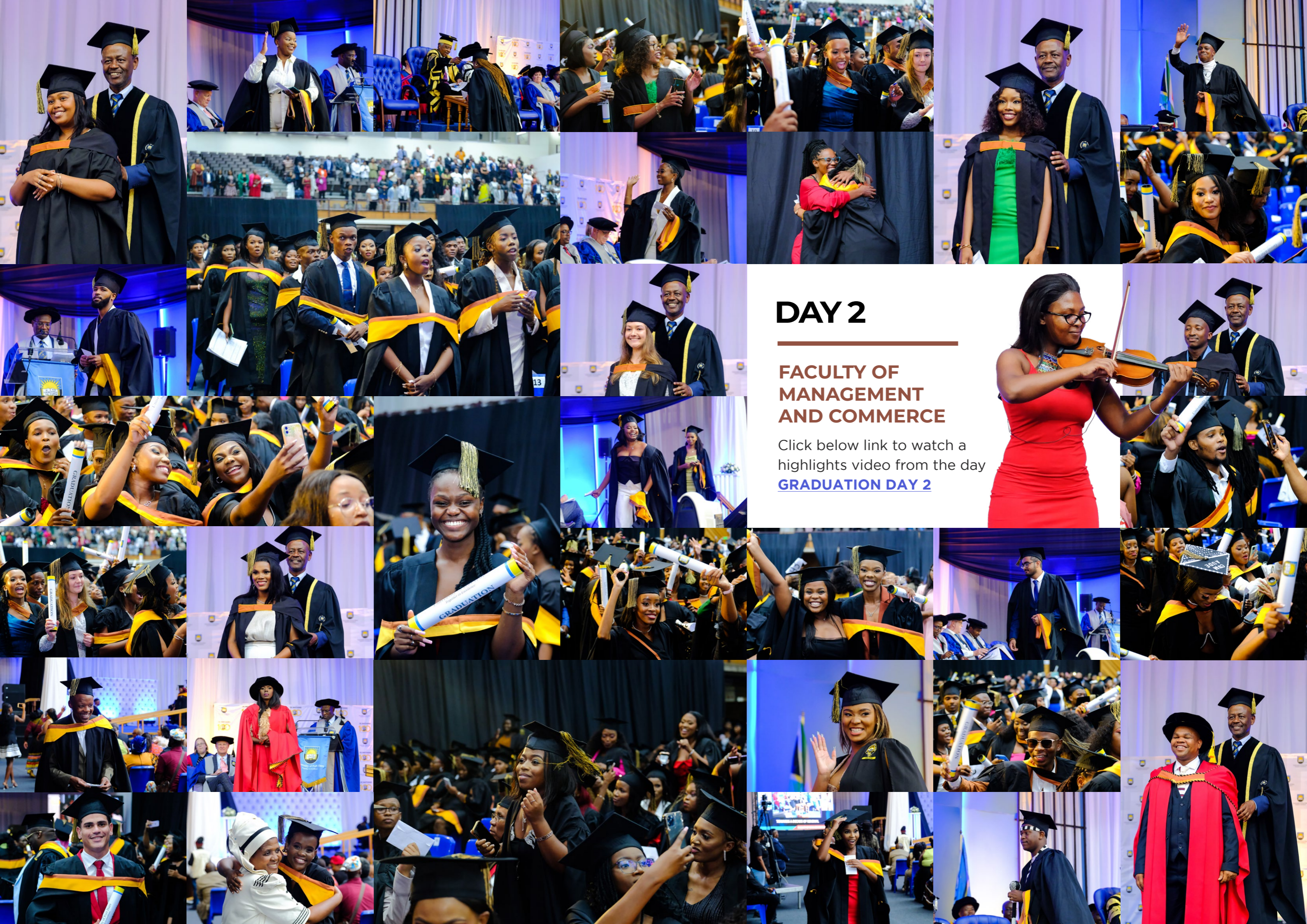
Despite the intricacies presented in his journey, the father of four went back for his Honours Degree in 2023.

“When I passed matric with good grades, my dream was to study further. However, my mother, a domestic worker in Johannesburg, had no means to pay for furthering my education. My only option was to enter the workplace. I started as a prison warden and after completing some security courses, I worked at the Gold Fields mine in Johannesburg as a security guard.”

“So, when the opportunity to study further was presented, I grabbed it with both hands.”

At his graduation, Mr. Pinini was accompanied by his wife and his two elder sisters, individuals he counts among his greatest supporters.

“I don’t know where and how far this degree will take me, but I know I have achieved my dream and that will lead me somewhere.”



DAY 2

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND COMMERCE

Click below link to watch a
highlights video from the day
[GRADUATION DAY 2](#)



FROM UFH TO THE INDUSTRY, THE FIRST COHORT OF SPEECH THERAPISTS

The University marked a historic milestone when it graduated the first cohort of students in the BSc Speech-Language Pathology programme during its 2024 Autumn Graduation.

Adding to the significance of this moment is the graduates' proficiency to practice in an African language, isiXhosa – a first for the country – and a huge leap forward in the field of speech therapy, particularly in South Africa, where linguistic and cultural diversity is rich but often overlooked in healthcare practices.

Altogether, thirteen students were capped, this after the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) indicated that they met the minimum requirements for HPCSA Registration under Community Service, Speech Therapy. They will be registered with the industry body.

The first intake for the qualification offered by the Faculty of Health Sciences was in 2018, two years after the Department of Rehabilitative Sciences officially opened its doors. Despite setbacks pertaining to approval issues with the HPCSA, the university remained steadfast in its commitment to providing students with comprehensive training in speech therapy.

Through tireless advocacy and unwavering determination led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching & Learning, Prof Renuka Vithal; the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Prof Liezel Cilliers, and staff at the Department, the university ultimately earned the approval needed to confer the degree upon its deserving students.

Excited to be among the first UFH cohort of speech therapy graduates is Ms Nangamso Bojana from Dutywa in the Eastern Cape. The 25-year-old said she enrolled in the program when it rolled out.

“Initially, I applied for a qualification in accounting, and then I learned about the speech therapy qualification that was being introduced. I instantly knew the



qualification was for me. I applied, and I was among the hopefuls shortlisted for the interviews, and fortunately, I made the cut to join the class.”

Bojana, whose studies were funded by the Eastern Cape Department of Health, says the need for her skills became apparent when opportunities came knocking, even before she graduated.

“These opportunities came through the provincial department of Health and unfortunately, at the time, I was not registered. This qualification, coupled with the endorsement from the HPCSA, will certainly open more doors of opportunities. I cannot wait to offer my skills and contribute to the well-being of people in our communities. The ability to assess and process patients in isiXhosa is a great advantage to the sector and, most importantly, the communities that will be serviced.”

Equally excited to be a graduate is Mr Siwongiwe Maki from Cathcart. Not only does he intend to bridge the gender gap in the field currently predominantly occupied by women, but he will also realize his career aspiration of working in the rehabilitative healthcare sector.

“Since high school, I wanted to become either an occupational therapist or a speech therapist. I heard about the qualification from a friend who was doing his nursing degree here at Fort Hare. I enrolled in it, straight after passing matric.”

Maki, whose studies were also funded by the Eastern Cape Department of Health, said he never lost hope that he would one day walk across the graduation stage and be certified as a qualified speech-language pathologist.

“To finally graduate means a lot, not only to me but also to my family who have been supportive throughout this journey.”

Speaking on behalf of the provincial Department of Health, Mr. Mkhululi Ndamase congratulated the graduates, saying: ‘We do not doubt that they will use their newfound knowledge to the benefit of the people of this province and the country.’

As they enter a sector with a pressing demand for their skills, expertise, and contributions, the University is confident that these graduates are poised to significantly impact the lives of South Africans grappling with speech disorders.”



“Life does not end with losing a certain ability to do something. There is always a way to move forward. Embrace the opportunity to learn, unlearn, and relearn ways that will assist you to adapt to new realities.”

TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH – ZIYANDA NJOLI’S STORY IS ONE OF SHEER RESILIENCE

In a world where adversity often threatens to overshadow hope, Ziyanda Njoli stands as a beacon of resilience and sheer determination. Eight years ago, the 30-year-old from Khwetyana, on the outskirts of East London experienced a tragic fall from the second floor of a building, an incident that left her with permanent paralysis from the waist down.

Though it was difficult to accept her new reality of navigating life with the aid of a wheelchair, she chose to rise above her circumstances. Ziyanda crossed the University of Fort Hare’s (UFH) 2024 Autumn Graduation stage to collect her Bachelor of Social Work degree.

Born in a humble household to parents who were farm workers, Ziyanda said she understood from a young age the transformative power of education. “Coming from a disadvantaged background, I always knew no other way than to get an education to change my life and that of my family for the better.”

“My parents worked in between farms around East London, and I was always glued by their side wherever they worked, while my older brother lived with our grandfather. My parents finally settled in the outskirts of East London, in a village called Khwetyana.”

The importance of education was instilled in her from the onset by her father. “By the age of six, I was already home-schooled by my dad who was a very philomathic man. I was blessed to have had the presence of both my parents even though they were not rich, they loved me dearly.”

Ziyanda started her formal schooling at Qwalasela Public School then moved to Rocklands Farm School, and later joined Ngwenyathi High School where she matriculated. Sadly, her father passed away when she was in matric.

The tragic fall occurred when she was in the second year of her studies in nursing. “I sustained a severe spinal cord injury which left me paralyzed from the waist down. The doctors confirmed that the injury was permanent.”

After a couple of years of sitting at home and healing psychologically, emotionally, and physically, she was

adamant about going back to school. With the help of her Social Worker who was assigned to her case by the hospital, Ziyanda was able to link up with the UFH’s Disability Unit where she received assistance and support from the moment she applied until she completed her studies as a Social Work student.

“If it was not for the Disability Unit, I believe I wouldn’t have grown and overcome the challenges of navigating university life as a student living with a disability. From the issues of accessibility to inclusiveness on campus activities and academic programmes, the Unit ensured these were placed. It played a huge role in empowering me as an individual to find my independence while living away from home. Fort Hare was truly a home away from home.”

Ziyanda said the inspiration to rise above her situation was drawn from her mother who also lives with a disability and her hope to be a role model to her eight-year-old son. “My mother suffered a stroke that left her with hemiplegia but not a single day has she ever wallowed in self-pity. She worked for years to support her family and never complained about her disability. I had no excuse. She embodies strength and resilience and that motivated me to not give up on myself.”

“I also wanted to affirm to my son that no matter what obstacles life presents, he can transform them into something remarkable and inspire hope in others. And this graduation is that affirmation.”

In advising and encouraging those who might have lost hope due to unfortunate circumstances, Ziyanda had this to say: “Life does not end with losing a certain ability to do something. There is always a way to move forward. Embrace the opportunity to learn, unlearn, and relearn ways that will assist you to adapt to new realities. Life is a matter of giving yourself a chance to grow and see beyond your pain. Do not hesitate to rely on the strength of those who love you to carry you until you gather your own. Give yourself a chance. You add value to this life.”

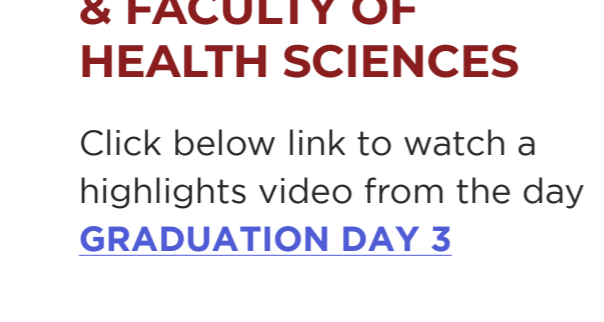
Ziyanda now hopes to utilize her set of knowledge and skills obtained from the degree to play a role in changing the lives of people who need social services.



DAY 3

FACULTY OF LAW & FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

Click below link to watch a highlights video from the day
[GRADUATION DAY 3](#)





THE GQEBAS, A FAMILY OF FORT HARE GRADUATES



CLICK HERE TO WATCH
HIGHLIGHT VIDEO

Three years ago, Mr Malinge Gqeba and his wife, Mrs Nokuzola Gqeba, graduated with their doctoral degrees from the University of Fort Hare (UFH). Last year, their daughter, Nangamso, obtained a Bachelor of Education degree from Fort Hare. This year, during the Autumn graduation, their son, Mava, collected his Bachelor of Music degree, also from Fort Hare. It is safe to say that this family from Mdantsane are true Fortarians.

Three years ago, Mr Malinge Gqeba and his wife, Mrs Nokuzola Gqeba, graduated with their doctoral degrees from the University of Fort Hare (UFH). Last year, their daughter, Nangamso, obtained a Bachelor of Education degree from Fort Hare. This year, during the Autumn graduation, their son, Mava, collected his Bachelor of Music degree, also from Fort Hare. It is safe to say that this family from Mdantsane are true Fortarians.

We met with the Gqebas' latest graduate, an award-winning performing artist. While preparing for graduation day, Mava was in the middle of rehearsals for his performance in a major production of Sarafina, showcased at the East London Guild Theatre this week.

While each family member might have different reasons for choosing Fort Hare to pursue their respective degrees, for the Cape Town-born Mava, who majored in jazz performance, it was the opportunity to further hone his craft under the guidance of the then Music HOD, Dr Nduduzo Makhathini—an internationally acclaimed jazz maestro.

“In addition to studying the history and theory of music, I wanted a hands-on approach to the practical side of music. I enrolled in 2020, Dr Makhathini was the HOD, and under his mentorship and leadership, I got to experience that approach.”

The 26-year-old started studying music and drama in high school, and his aptitude took him on a tour in 2015, where he took South African theatre to various schools in Hong Kong and Beijing.

While at Fort Hare, Mava continued to establish himself as a great performing artist. In his final year, he stole the show at the 2023 National Arts Festival (NAF) when he walked away with the Standard Bank Ovation Award for his one-man show titled, “Dear Tata: What Makes A Man a Man?” According

to the organizers of this well-renowned festival, the Standard Bank Ovation Awards are given to fringe performances that are well received by audiences, are well presented or produced, and have a good script or a standout cast, among other things. This was his second award, the previous year, he won as part of an ensemble that performed in the acclaimed musical “Afrika Sings!”

Mava, a Music Teacher at the Sonwa Sakuba Institute for the Performing Arts, says the degree from Fort Hare has truly empowered him.

“This degree has further empowered me through the knowledge and theories that I needed to create more art. It pushed the boundaries of what is considered to be art. Additionally, it laid the foundation for my quest to create new knowledge through academic research on the South African entertainment industry.”

Mava plans to pursue his master’s degree in music soon. For now, he is preparing for the NAF in June where he will perform in four shows, including his one-man show and Sarafina.

LIFE BEGINS AT 40!

WATCH | On her 40th birthday back in 2016, Zukiswa Silinyana, a mother of three from Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape, hesitantly pushed open the doors of UFH to pursue her first university degree.

Over the years, she completed a Bachelor of Social Science degree and an Honours Degree.

This season, she collected her Masters Degree in Psychology and now stands on the brink of yet another milestone - her PhD candidacy.



CLICK HERE TO
WATCH THE VIDEO



PRIDE AND ADMIRATION - UFH SECURITY OFFICERS AND CLEANERS CELEBRATE THEIR COLLEAGUES WHO GRADUATED THIS SEASON

With hearts brimming with pride and eyes shimmering with admiration, a group of security officers and cleaners at the University of Fort Hare (UFH) gathered on the East London Campus to celebrate their colleagues who graduated during the University's 2024 Autumn Graduation in April.

The heartwarming event, organized by the security officers, was held at the Nkuhlu Department of Accounting.

The new graduates honoured on the day are, Ms. Nolusindiso Falabiwe, who obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree; Ms. Phindiwe Mpukane, also a BA graduate; and Ms. Noziphiwo Govuza, who obtained a Bachelor of Administration in Public Administration degree. The three officers are posted on different premises on the East London campus.

Also honored, in absentia, was Mr Mpumelelo Pinini, the security guard at the De Beers Art Gallery on the Alice campus, whose story made headline news after graduating with a BCom Honours Degree in Developmental Studies.

Sharing their journeys to graduation, it was evident that juggling a 12-hour shift, parenting, family, and their studies was not easy but was worth it when they crossed the graduation stage to collect their respective degrees.

"The decision to further my education was driven by a desire to make a meaningful impact in my community and to provide a better future for my family. As a mother of three beautiful children, I understood the value of education and the doors it could open. Balancing my responsibilities as a mother, a student, and a security officer required meticulous time management and unwavering commitment," said Govuza.

Although there were moments of doubt in her journey, Govuza persevered despite the hurdles. "The late nights studying, the early mornings

balancing spreadsheets and school runs, and the countless sacrifices all led to the moment I had been working towards - graduation," she said.

Falabiwe says growing up she never imagined herself draped in academic regalia, simply because her circumstances did not allow her to dream that far. "I grew up in an impoverished household. I am that child we went to school with a torn uniform that I needed to tuck in to hide its rags."

According to Falabiwe, her journey was ignited by a conversation between Prof Ulene Schiller, who is an Associate Prof at the Department of Social Work and the Deputy Dean for Teaching Learning and Community Engagement at the department. "It was right in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic when Prof Schiller walked past my station and a conversation ensued. She advised me to use some of my free time to pursue a university degree. This was a dream I had always had and after that day, I finally decided to pursue it."

Today, Falabiwe is the first graduate in her family. "The main reason I undertook this journey was to ensure that my daughter does not experience the hardships I experienced growing up. I want her to have a better life and dream big for her future," she said.

Ms Mpukane said obtaining a university degree had always been her lifelong dream, to make her father proud. "My parents were uneducated and did not understand the value of education. As such, when I failed matric, my father told me he is not paying for me to re-do the grade."

Undeterred, Mpukane fixed her broken school shoe and sewed her tracksuit and went back to school to repeat her matric. "I approached the principal and informed him about my situation and that I did not have money for school fees. Fortunately, I was welcomed."



“What they have achieved is commendable and encourages others to follow suit. Now we hope that with these new qualifications under the belts, the doors of opportunities will open wide for them.”

After passing matric, her elder brother paid for her to complete her security grades and a computer course.

When she was deployed to UFH, she saw it as an opportunity to revisit her dream of getting a university degree. "When I got accepted, I was anxious and excited. Excited because I will finally be starting my journey toward my dream but anxious about how I will do it balancing a 12-hour shift and being a mother. As such, I broke down several times in this journey, especially when my father fell ill."

Through her many tears, Mpukane never backed down in her quest.

Sadly, when she graduated her father had passed away a year earlier. "I wanted to see the pride on his face and also for him to finally understand the value

of education when he saw me in the robe and being capped."

Their supervisor, Nkululeko Mhlana, said these officers served as an inspiration to their colleagues who aspire to be university graduates. "What they have achieved is commendable and encourages others to follow suit. Now we hope that with these new qualifications under the belts, the doors of opportunities will open wide for them."

As laughter mingled with tears of joy, and songs of cheers reverberated in the venue, it became evident that the celebration was not just about academic degrees, it was proof to the power of solidarity, and the boundless possibilities that arise when a community rallies behind its own.



DAY 4

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Click below link to watch a highlights video from the day
[GRADUATION DAY 4](#)

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL: FORMER TRAIN DRIVER AND STROKE SURVIVOR GRADUATES AGAINST ALL ODDS

“I am loss for words when it comes to expressing the support that my family and this University have offered me during my dark days.”

Simbongile Qabaka worked as a train driver in Cape Town for seven years before deciding to alter his life’s trajectory. In 2018, he enrolled at the University of Fort Hare (UFH) to pursue his first university degree. However, he encountered a setback when he unfortunately suffered a major stroke during his first year of studies, a setback that landed him in the hospital for months.

Nevertheless, this unfortunate incident did not derail the 43-year-old. After recovery, he returned to campus to finish the journey he had started.

During the UFH 2024 Autumn Graduation, with the aid of a walking stick, Qabaka crossed the stage to collect his Bachelor of Social Science in Human Settlement degree.

“My journey was not one without challenges; there were several dark moments. However, now that I have graduated, I can confidently say I have reached the light at the end of the tunnel,” he said.

Born and raised in Alice, Qabaka attended primary and high school in his hometown before moving to Gqeberha to complete his Matric at Ed-U College. After passing matric, he pursued a qualification in taxation, however, he was unable to complete his studies and decided to look for work outside the province.

After some years of serving in various positions at several companies such as a pizza manufacturing company, a security guard, and a driver, he landed a job as a train driver at Metro Rail.

“There was a call for applicants to undergo a learnership program to become train drivers. I decided to apply, and I was successful. I enjoyed driving trains, however, at the back of my mind,

I always had that burning desire to obtain a university degree.”

In 2016, Qabaka decided to pull the brakes on his train driving career to fulfill his lifelong dream of acquiring a university degree. He returned to his hometown in Alice and enrolled at UFH in 2018.

“My father passed away at an early stage in my life. I was 14 years old when he died, and so my mother took care of me and six other siblings. She was a primary school teacher, and I told myself I want to complete my degree so that my mom didn’t have to work so hard for us.

“When I was accepted at UFH, I was excited. Finally, I was on the path that I have always longed to walk.”

However, that excitement was short-lived when, two months into his studies, while coming out of class, he fell to the ground and woke up in the hospital with no recollection of what had happened.

“I was talking to my classmates about an assignment that was due that we needed to complete when I suddenly felt dazed and hit the ground. The next moment, I woke up in the hospital with some of my family members and doctors standing over me. I could not speak or move, and at the time, I did not remember the names of my family.”

When he finally came to a few days later, Qabaka was told that he had suffered a severe stroke that paralyzed the right side of his body. “I was devastated. All I could think of was that I needed to get back to campus and finish the assignment that was due.”



After months of undergoing different rehabilitative treatments, Qabaka returned to campus, albeit with a slight slur in his speech and paralysis in his right hand, even more determined to complete his degree. He currently works as an intern at the University’s Sports Department.

“I am loss for words when it comes to expressing the support that my family and this University have offered me during my dark days. The faculty manager, staff from the Disability Unit, and the maintenance were some of the people who were instrumental in ensuring that I reached my destination.”

For a beaming and emotional Qabaka, the graduation occasion was made even more memorable by his 17-year-old daughter, Phumelela, who is a Grade 12 pupil and was among those who witnessed the momentous occasion.

The father of three now hopes to secure employment as a human settlement practitioner to enhance living conditions.

FOUR-TIMES GRADUATE'S DOCTORAL THESIS SHEDS LIGHT ON CAREER CHALLENGES OF SENIOR BLACK FEMALE ACADEMICS IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES



Vuyelwa Dondolo recently achieved a significant milestone in her academic journey when she transitioned from “Ms” to “Dr. Dondolo,” graduating with a Doctorate in Philosophy in Industrial Psychology from the University of Fort Hare (UFH) - her fourth qualification obtained from Fort Hare.

The 31-year-old, born in Johannesburg and raised in the Eastern Cape, holds a Bachelor of Administration in Human Resource Management, a Bachelor of Commerce Honours degree in Industrial Psychology, and a Master of Commerce in Industrial Psychology.

Her PhD thesis, titled “The Career Development Processes of Senior Black Female Academics in South African Universities,” sheds light on the intricate challenges faced by senior black female academics and offers valuable insights into overcoming these obstacles.

Dr Dondolo credits the genesis of her research to her mentor and supervisor, Professor Willie Chinyamurindi, whose guidance and expertise directed her towards addressing real-life complexities in the field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

“It was in the title that my supervisor and I wanted to explore the lived experiences of senior Black female academics working in a historically disadvantaged university. Moreover, we wanted to investigate the complexities they experienced, especially in the post-1994 South African landscape.”

“From these complexities, we aimed to understand how these participants overcame challenges. We sought to explore their resolution tactics and share both the positive and negative aspects of being female, Black, and growing up in societies that often viewed females as caregivers rather than career-focused individuals.”

Utilizing the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach, twenty senior Black female academics working in a historically disadvantaged institution (HDI) participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, employing narrative analysis to solicit responses from participants.

“I believe that my PhD and its extensive thesis will make a difference in the lives of every scholar who reads it.”

Three main findings emerged from the study:

1. First, intersectionality archetypes were identified as barriers to the career development process of senior Black female academics.
2. Second, the study revealed the interconnected nexus between serendipitous events, premeditated actions, and the seizing of opportunities to aid the career development of senior Black female academics.
3. Finally, in addressing the barriers experienced during their career development, the study found that both direct and indirect agentic power played a role in overcoming obstacles and promoting career advancement.

According to Dr Dondolo, the findings may assist career counsellors in identifying challenges faced by senior Black female academics, such as racial discrimination, gender bias, and social class obstacles. Additionally, they may inform policy development within higher education institutions.

Reflecting on her journey, Dr Dondolo, who works as a Consultant at the UFH Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC), expressed profound gratitude for the opportunities that propelled her toward academic excellence, including her tenure as a visiting scholar at the University of Connecticut and participation in the Technological Higher Education Network South Africa (THENSA) programme.

She also candidly shared the challenges she faced, including fatigue and mental health struggles, toward the culmination of her PhD journey.

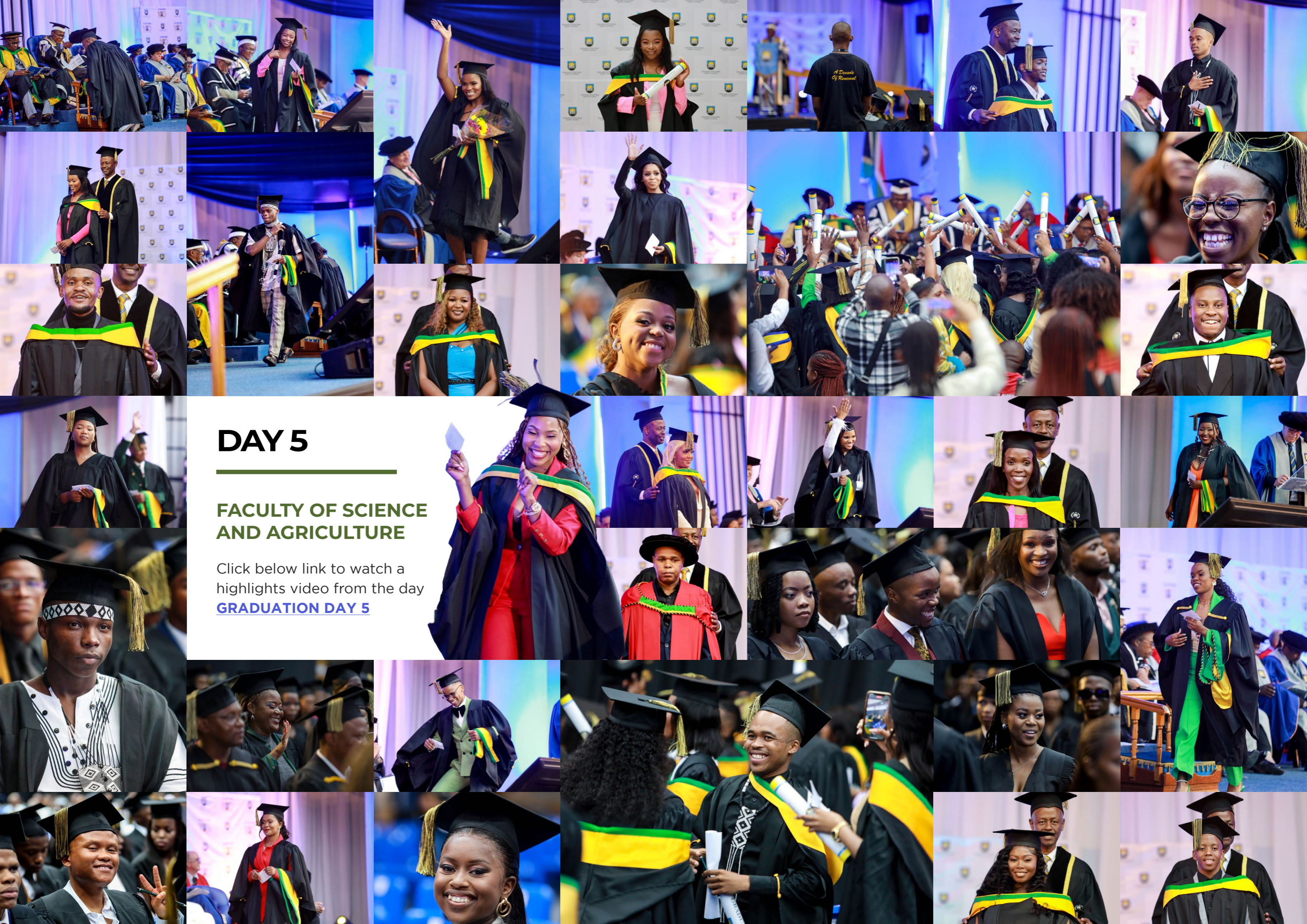
“The work and professional interactions with Prof Chinyamurindi and co-supervisor, Prof Olabanji Oni motivated me further. I believe that my PhD and its extensive thesis will make a difference in the lives of every scholar who reads it.”

She expressed her gratitude to Prof Vuyisile Nkonki, UFH TLC Director, for playing a vital role in her doctoral journey. “Prof Nkonki offered insights on how to proceed with my manuscript. To aid my research development, we collaborated on research projects, which served as stepping stones for skills and knowledge that I incorporated into my thesis. That was the rewarding aspect of my growth.”

Despite hardships, her determination to contribute meaningfully to academia remained unwavering.

Now, the mother of an eight-year-old daughter looks forward to publishing from her thesis, supervising students, engaging in more collaborations and networking, and, hopefully, attaining a professorship in the coming years. “Most importantly, I look forward to having more family time from now on,” she said.

Congratulations, Dr Dondolo.



DAY 5

FACULTY OF SCIENCE AND AGRICULTURE

Click below link to watch a
highlights video from the day
[GRADUATION DAY 5](#)

BLUES SKIPPER FATYELA TAKES VITAL LESSONS WITH HIM AS HE GRADUATES

The leadership qualities Kamvelihle Fatyela has shown as captain of the Fort Hare rugby team will stand him in great stead as he looks forward to a career in the classroom.

The 25-year-old, who lifted the FNB Varsity Shield trophy with UFH in 2022, graduated from the institution with a Bachelor of Education degree.

It marks the culmination of a remarkable journey that has seen him reach the pinnacle of his sport at the university and come away with a qualification that will allow him to develop the next generation of South Africans.

While his final year with the Blues did not bring any silverware, his inspirational leadership ensured that his side would remain in the Varsity Shield in 2025.

Their dogged determination to avoid the drop was evidenced in the last two matches of the season. They demolished UKZN in Alice before beating TUT on their home turf in Pretoria.

Fatyela, who hails from Zwelitsha in Qonce (King William's Town) where he attended Dale Junior before moving to Durban High School in KwaZulu-Natal, had not originally intended pursuing studies in education.

It was the only course available to him at the time and, as the years went by, he grew to love it.

Now that he has graduated, he aims to find work at a high school where he can teach English and Economics to Grade 10 to 12 learners.

He has no intention of hanging up his boots and will resume training with the Border senior side for whom he has turned out previously.

Fatyela said his studies had helped him become a better leader.

"In schools you have to take charge, but you also have to listen to other people. You learn that you should not be afraid to take risks but also ask for assistance if needed," he said.

"You don't just demand respect, you earn it, and you need to engage with people. It's not just 'everything I say goes'. You have to think about other people as well and ask yourself how your decisions affect them."

He will remember winning the Shield for the rest of his life and without question considers it the highlight of his student career.

Making sure his young team would remain in the competition brought its own rewards, he said.

"With this being my final year, it would have been terrible to lose out on the competition next season.

"I spoke to the older guys in the team and said, 'Let's do it for these younger guys'. We couldn't just leave knowing that we would be relegated."

Commitment has always been among Fatyela's strongest points and putting this year's Shield campaign above his personal ambitions to play provincial rugby is yet more testament to his character.

Playing the game professionally is still very much on his radar, which means there "won't be much time to celebrate" his graduation as he rejoins Border training.

Finishing at Fort Hare, his home for the past four years, was always going to be bittersweet, but he is also looking forward to seeing what the next chapter brings.

As he leaves, he urges those still at the university to "make every moment count".

"Always strive to achieve. You might have difficulties but look past them. Life is a rollercoaster and it will always have its ups and downs."



"Always strive to achieve. You might have difficulties but look past them. Life is a rollercoaster and it will always have its ups and downs."



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

PRODUCED BY

Institutional Advancement

FOR COMMENTS, IDEAS AND STORY LEADS:

Aretha Linden - alinden@ufh.ac.za
