



HIGHLIGHTS

from the

RECTOR'S MANAGEMENT REPORT

to

COUNCIL

Monday 18 September 2023

Prof Wim de Villiers,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor

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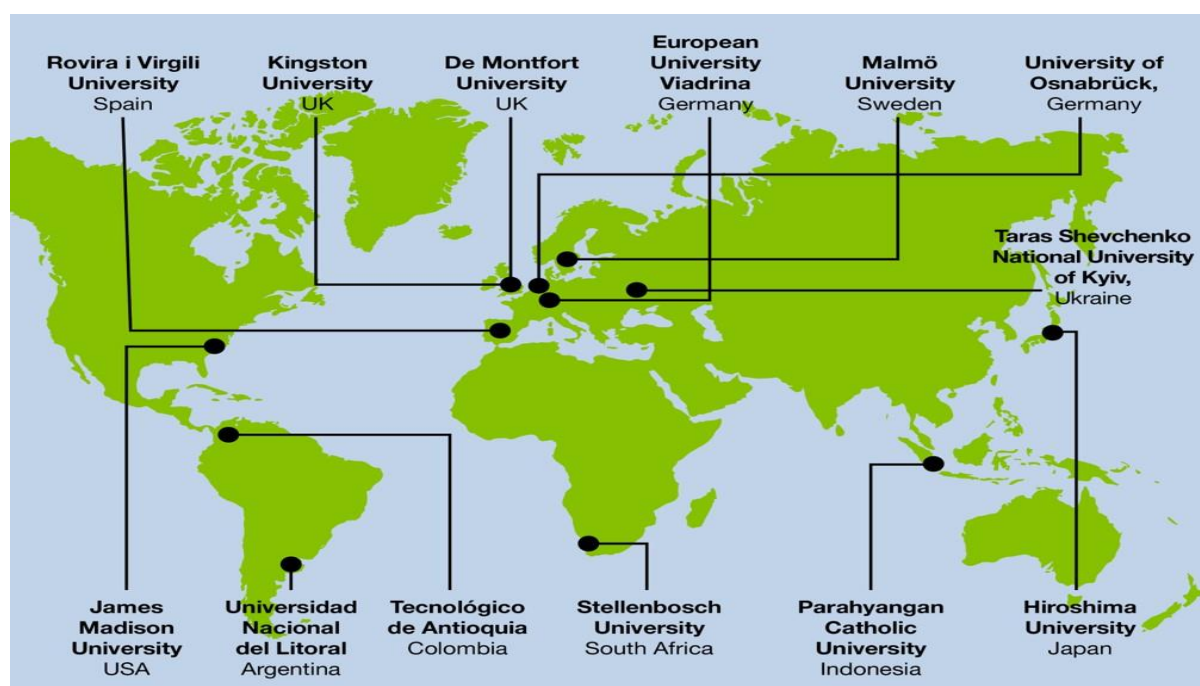
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My report to this third Council meeting for 2023 focuses on how we integrate education and research at Stellenbosch University (SU) for the benefit of society and to create a better future for the communities we serve.

As I reported previously, universities globally are seriously reviewing their academic projects following the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic to give new impetus to their role as institutions of social change and development. Key questions in this regard are: How can universities navigate the challenges in their political contexts, and still have a positive impact on society? What can universities do, both individually and together, to advance social justice beyond their campuses? And how can international collaborations help?

Since my colleague, Prof Hester Klopper, will also be reporting to this Council meeting on the salient activities and initiatives in her portfolio of Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs, the more granular details of some of these matters will be covered in her presentation. Suffice it to say that the International Network of Universities (INU) at its summit in Japan on 6 August appointed SU to lead this foremost higher education leadership think tank (*see membership map below*) for the next two years in harnessing universities' power to transform society. This attests to our growing international standing and reputation as a reliable research partner.



Moreover, since our last meeting, we have seen a host of significant achievements that place SU among the world's best in terms of our skills base, research capacity and formidable networks.

Leading international clusters of excellence

We are truly doing pioneering work in tackling some of the intractable challenges confronting society today. This is confirmed by our leadership role in four Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs).

The CoREs are a joint initiative of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities (The Guild). The clusters are structured around the African Union-European Union Innovation Agenda.

SU will either lead or help lead the following CoREs:

- **Genomics for health in Africa**, which will be linked to the Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation (CERI) in our School for Data Science and Computational Thinking – SU lead: Prof Tulio de Oliveira
- **Nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation**, which will be linked to our School for Climate Studies – SU lead: Prof Guy Midgley
- **Artificial intelligence, data science, and theoretical and computational thinking**, which will be linked to the National Institute for Theoretical and Computational Science (NITheCS) – SU lead: Prof Francesco Petruccione
- **Renewable energy**, which will be linked to the SU-hosted ARUA Centre of Excellence in Energy – SU lead: Prof Neill Goosen

In addition, we will be a partner in the CoRE on **Multimorbidity**, which will be co-led by the universities of Ghana and Warwick. It will be linked to our South African Centre for Epidemiological Modelling and Analysis (SACEMA), with Dr Cari van Schalkwyk serving as SU project lead.

Strengthening research and innovation collaboration between the African and European Union is a key priority in light of the challenges of our continent. In this way, we can help foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth and job generation, thereby reducing poverty and inequalities.

Solidifying and expanding our research chairs

In addition to our newly added research chairs in green energy, Afrikaans creative writing as well as financial regulation that I reported on at our last meeting, the National Research Foundation (NRF) recently confirmed that the funding for the following six existing SARChI chairs would be extended by another five years:

- Mathematical and theoretical physical biosciences – Prof Cang Hui
- Animal tuberculosis – Prof Michele Miller
- Biomarkers for tuberculosis – Prof Gerhard Walzl
- Food, environment, nutrition, and health – Prof Xikombiso Mbenyane
- Mycobactomics – Prof Samantha Sampson
- Health and rehabilitation sciences – Prof Quinette Louw

The funding extension is based on the significant research output of these chairs.

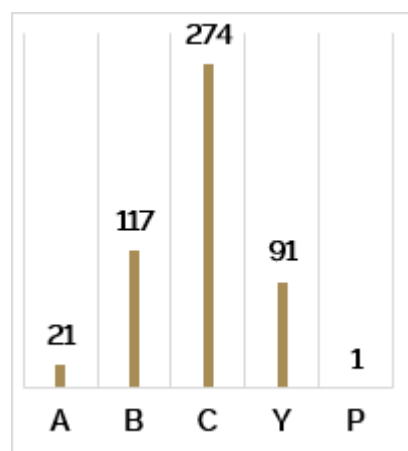
SU has also gained a new research chair in urban law and sustainability governance in the Department of Mercantile Law. The incumbent of the chair, which was established with the financial support of the SU Law Trust, is Prof Anél du Plessis.

Prior to this appointment, Prof Du Plessis led the SARChI chair in cities, law and environmental sustainability at North-West University. Her scholarship is devoted to the socio-legal interrogation of urban and local government and its intersection with environmental, climate change and constitutional law in South Africa and beyond.

Research chairs enable us to advance knowledge by producing high-quality postgraduate students and research outputs. The chairs serve as incubation spaces for emerging researchers to launch their careers under the guidance of leading scientists and bolster our pursuit of research excellence and the development of local and global scholarly capacity.

SU officially boasts over 500 NRF-rated researchers

We now have 504 rated researchers according to the latest NRF ratings (*indicated by category in the graph alongside*). In addition to a good showing in the categories for leading (A), acclaimed (B) and established (C) researchers, we are also experiencing an upward trend in the category for young and upcoming researchers (Y). The latter bodes well for the future of a research-intensive university.



Exploring collaboration with foremost United States and Canadian universities

On my recent collaboration-seeking trip to the United States, I visited some of North America's top universities, namely Harvard's Business School and Institute for Global Law and Policy, Notre Dame University in Illinois, and the Harvey Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University. There, like elsewhere in the world, service to society is receiving renewed attention.

I had a similar experience at the Canadian universities of Waterloo, Toronto Metropolitan and Ottawa, where we explored partnerships spanning an array of disciplines, from artificial intelligence through data science and renewable energy to health sciences and economics.

SU soars 171 places on QS world rankings

While rankings will always remain contentious in our sector, SU's remarkable improvement on the 2024 QS World University Rankings is certainly noteworthy. Having jumped 171 places, we made the world's top 300 tertiary institutions for the first time.

Most significantly, we performed outstandingly in the category of citations per faculty (the number of academic citations received by papers produced by a university in a five-year period) by achieving the highest score (59,9) of all South African universities. Since citations are a well-understood and widely accepted measure of research strength, this indicator attests to the intensity and volume of our research.

The rankings, which were released at the end of June, puts SU at number 283 globally compared to last year's 454. This is our best showing on the QS rankings since joining in 2011. We are ranked third in South Africa (and Africa).

Significant growth in philanthropic funding

SU continues to make great strides in mobilising alternative revenue streams to deliver on our key strategic objectives. Total donation income from philanthropic sources for the first semester of 2023 was R205 070 781, which is 48% more than philanthropic income for the corresponding period in 2022 (R134 485 185).

Approximately 75% of all donations came from within South Africa. A total of 205 donors from other world regions made up the balance. We are particularly pleased with the increase in donation income from the United Kingdom and Ireland, Europe, and North America.

It is also worth noting that corporates, foundations, foreign agencies, government agencies and trusts accounted for 94% of the donations received in this period.

Sector	Donors	Donations
Bequests	27	R19 910 493
Civil society, religious, other	35	R6 480 042
Corporate	97	R65 422 156
Corporate – BBBEE/skills levy	20	R6 082 460
Foreign agencies	3	R1 787 462
Government agencies	0	R0
Individual giving	409	R12 884 683
Trusts and foundations	65	R92 543 483
Total	656	R205 070 781

No less than 37% of donation income has been directed to undergraduate and postgraduate student bursaries as well as wrap-around support for students. However, the need remains great. Among the poorest students in particular, the NSFAS shortfall in accommodation and food allowances at SU alone is in the region of R81 million.

Ongoing engagement on NSFAS issues

The issues pertaining to the capping of students' accommodation allowances, reduced subsistence funding and complete de-funding of students by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) are well documented. In addition, NSFAS has proceeded with the direct payment of allowances via a credit card facility, which has further raised the ire of students.

At the time of writing this report, violent protests had erupted on a few campuses as a direct result of students' grievances with key aspects of the allocation and delivery of NSFAS allowances to qualifying students. The student leadership structures of the four Western Cape universities planned a protest event at the NSFAS head office in Cape Town in an effort to convince the authorities to reconsider some of the funding decisions.

SU continues to engage with both NSFAS and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as part of our consultative approach to achieve a sustainable outcome for all parties. We have also submitted information on students' funding challenges to Universities South Africa (USAf). Our submission covered the key issues of the student accommodation cap, the new direct allowance payment system, and NSFAS funds owed to SU.

Ultimately, we remain committed to working with the higher education sector and student leadership structures to ensure that our institution remains financially sustainable and that all our students are afforded access to higher education.

Enhancing engagement between donors and beneficiaries as part of essential student academic support

On 31 August, SU opened the Masiphumelele Centre, which is intended to significantly improve our offering to our foremost scholarship donors. Utilising donor funds, Development and Alumni Relations has created a fully equipped meeting and facilitation space for engagement between donors and their bursary recipients.

The purpose is to provide a comfortable environment for individual student meetings or interviews, a gathering space for engagements between bursars and donors, as well as a training and workshop venue. The Masiphumelele Centre, which is located at 115 Banghoek Road, includes office space (for the coordinators of both the Dell Young Leaders and Ikusasa (ISFAP) programmes), consultation rooms, workspaces for visitors, a conversation and breakaway area, and a meeting room for 12 to 14 people.

This kind of philanthropic gift assists the University enormously to maintain our diverse offering to our communities, town, country and continent.

Growing SU's alumni chapters

We have expanded our global alumni chapters to 36, of which 13 are located in South Africa. In the first semester of 2023, the University hosted 10 074 guests at 77 alumni engagement events.

Considering that our current students will join our alumni community, we have placed more emphasis in recent years on sharing the excitement of being SU alumni with our 'pre-alumni' community. To this end, Development and Alumni Relations launched the Maties Valued Parent (MVP) programme at the welcome event for parents earlier this year. They also engaged our March graduates at the graduation toast event.

Contingency committee managing implications of loadshedding

Following the increase in loadshedding episodes, SU has implemented an Electricity Crisis Contingency Committee (ECCC) to help manage our operations amidst fluctuating national power supply.

The ECCC works on three possible scenarios, namely a baseline of stage 6 loadshedding, more intense loadshedding (stages 8 and 9), and the unlikely event of an extended blackout should the national or provincial grids collapse. The baseline scenario is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

With this in mind, we have proceeded with the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Subcommittee's recommendation to shift the starting time of all lectures to ten minutes past the hour. This will help minimise the loss of class time due to the on-the-hour loadshedding cycle. The amended timetable will remain in place for the duration of the second semester or until otherwise communicated. Faculties have also been asked to make lecture material available to students two weeks in advance, and to encourage students to download these resources as soon as they can to minimise disruption to learning should the network be unavailable for an extended period.

In the meantime, the Research Subcommittee's work on risk mitigation plans to safeguard vulnerable research equipment and critical material continues, with most of the relevant faculties having submitted contingency plans.

Our ECCC is also represented on the USAf working group for energy planning. This group is tasked with preparing a framework from which universities can develop their energy plans, which are to be submitted to DHET by the end of September 2023.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RECTOR'S MANAGEMENT REPORT

In the following paragraphs, I provide highlights from my management report. For an in-depth look at contributions from the various responsibility centres, please turn to the addendum.

1. SUNFin went live on 26 July

The mammoth undertaking to switch from our 30-year-old legacy financial system Tera Term to our new Oracle Cloud Financials platform, dubbed SUNFin, started four years and three months ago and culminated in the go-live of the new system on 26 July 2023. The project team, mostly made up of staff from the Finance and Information Technology divisions, worked around the clock to implement SUNFin, which is the largest system of its kind at our university.

2. StellenboschX offering on artificial intelligence in higher education

After a successful funding application, a team of colleagues from our centres for Teaching and Learning, Learning Technologies as well as Academic Planning and Quality Assurance set about developing a programme on artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education teaching, learning and assessment to add to our edX portfolio, StellenboschX. The programme consists of four individual short courses that can be followed as stand-alone offerings. Once all four courses have been completed, a participant will receive the professional certificate. At the time of writing, the first course was scheduled to go live in August, with the rest following at regular intervals soon thereafter.

3. South African Sign Language celebrated as country's 12th official language



On 19 July, South African Sign Language (SASL) officially became our country's 12th official language when President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the South African Sign Language Bill into law. This is a major leap forward in championing the rights of individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing. The recognition of SASL as an official language enables our Language Centre and other, likeminded entities to advocate even more strongly for increased access to communication for the Deaf community.

Currently, little to no formal provision is made for SASL interpreting, which means that Deaf South Africans remain isolated from some basic services in society.

In May, the Language Centre established an SASL portfolio as part of its efforts to empower Deaf students, staff and the broader Deaf community to access everything that SU has to offer.

4. SU staff and students attend Umoja African Student Leaders Network Summit

Seven staff from our Centre for Student Leadership, Experiential Education and Citizenship (CSLEEC) and six SU students participated in the third Umoja African Student Leaders Network Summit at the University of Lagos in Nigeria in July.

Themed "Technology and culture preservation", the summit saw student leaders and student leadership professionals from various African nations convene to:

- discuss the role of technology in safeguarding Africa's diverse cultural heritage;
- find solutions to the challenges posed by technology to cultural preservation in Africa;
- foster good governance and ethical leadership among student leaders;
- explore the potential of digital platforms to connect African student leaders and enable the exchange of ideas and research; and
- align the activities of the African Student Leaders Network with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The idea for an African student leader summit was first proposed by our very own Students' Representative Council members during their participation in the African Student Leaders Exchange Programme, a collaboration between SU International and Student Affairs, back in 2019.

In addition to their deliberations during panel discussions, participants visited the Lagos State House of Assembly, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and virtually engaged with the School of International Futures. As the event also coincided with Mandela Week, student leaders attended discussions on leadership and community service, including "Making more Mandelas: Community giving". Other activities included a three-minute thesis competition hosted by the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, and an entrepreneurship presentation by the Tony Elumelu Foundation.

The SU delegation's active participation in the summit demonstrated our staff and students' commitment to meaningful collaboration and leadership development across our continent.



Pictured at the Umoja African Student Leaders Network Summit in Nigeria are, from left, Dr Heidi October (acting director of CSLEEC, and head of the Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert (FVZS) Institute for Student Leadership Development), Anele Mdepa (Student Governance manager), Nina Hugo (former chair of the SU chapter of the United Nations Association of South Africa), Aurelia Mouton and Tiaan Booyens (both from Die Matie student newspaper) and Spurgeon-Haddon Wilson (FVZS Institute programme manager). Picture courtesy of the University of Lagos.

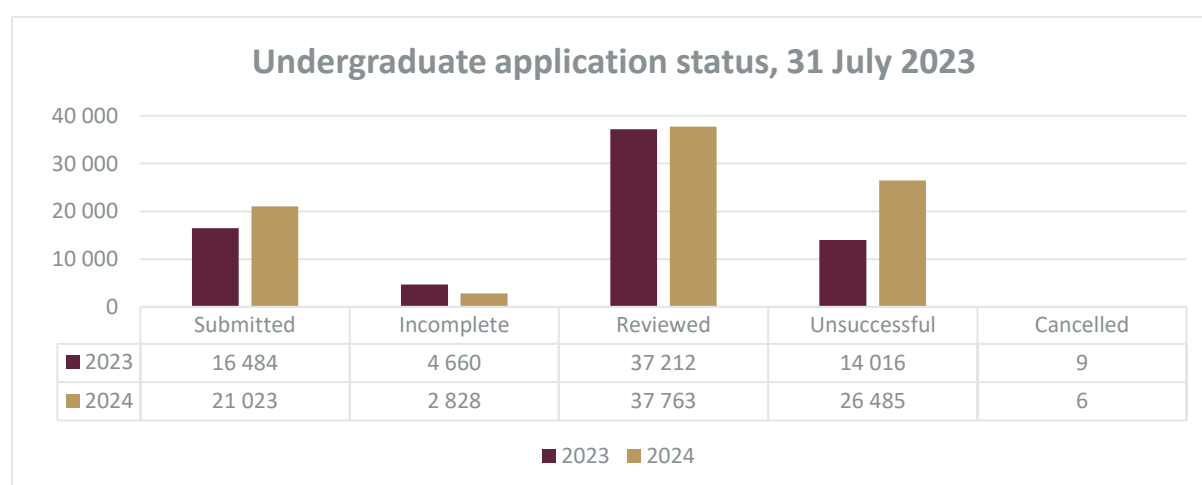
5. Applications

Undergraduate applications for 2024 closed on 31 July 2023. Our number of undergraduate applicants had increased by 22% from 72 381 for the 2023 intake to 88 105 for 2024 (*see table below*). Applications for postgraduate programmes are still open. However, by the end of July, we had already received 24% more applications across all categories than the previous year.

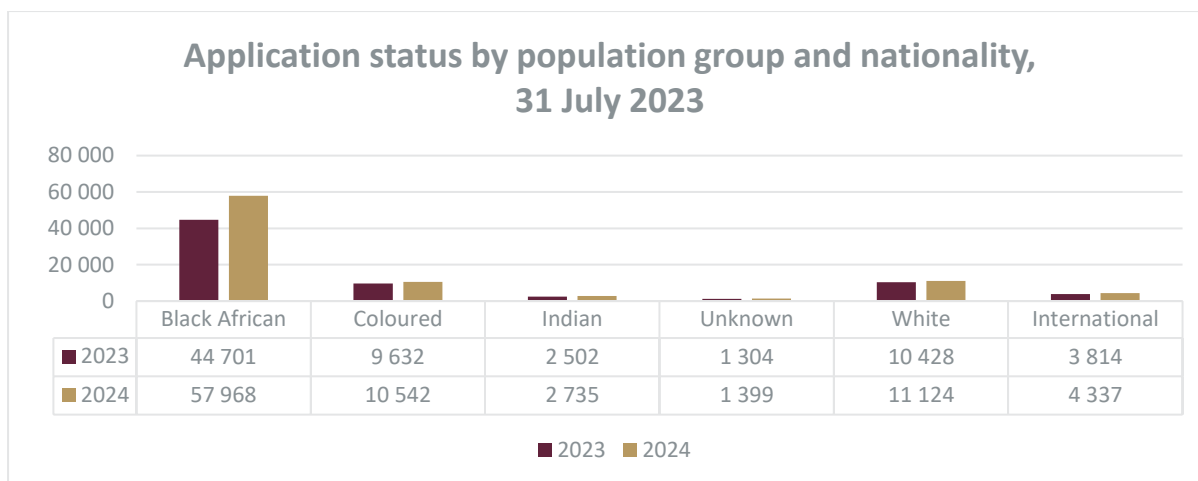
Application category	2023 intake	2024 intake	% increase
Undergraduate	72 381	88 105	21,70%
Postgraduate	6 744	9 728	44,20%
Occasional	78	296	164,10%
Total	79 203	98 129	23,80%

Undergraduate applications

As the following chart shows, our new SUNStudent system continues to have a positive impact on undergraduate application processes. Because the system clearly displays the status of an application, this simplifies communication regarding outstanding documents and has resulted in a 40% decrease in incomplete applications. The business process for managing unsuccessful applications in the pre-review phase has also improved.

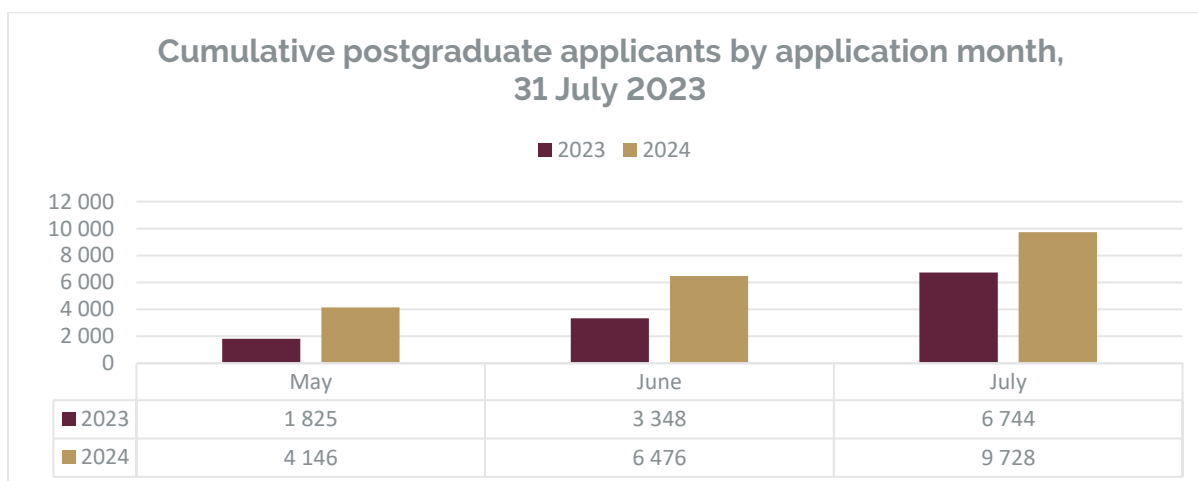


In terms of population groups, black African applicants increased by almost 30%, while applicants from all other groups grew by 7–9%. We also received 14% more applications from international students compared to the previous year (*see table below*).



Postgraduate applications to date

Postgraduate applications for the 2024 intake have been significantly higher than for the 2023 intake, both by month and overall (*see graph below*). The total number of postgraduate applications received to date points to a 44,2% increase over last year.



6. Century-old Botanical Garden thrives

SU's Botanical Garden will mark its centenary with a week-long Stellenbosch Flora Festival during the Woordfees in October 2023. The event will serve as a celebration of our enduring commitment to botanical preservation and education, a century of dedicated work, and a vision for a sustainable future.

As of June 2023, the Botanical Garden boasts an impressive collection of nearly 300 conservation-grade species, many of which face the risk of extinction in their natural habitats. A significant proportion of these species were sourced from SU's immediate surroundings.

What sets our Botanical Garden apart from other, similar institutions in South Africa and elsewhere is its unwavering commitment to ensuring that both population size and genetic diversity are appropriately preserved. To this end, it strictly adheres to global best practice for conservation. Since 2020, approximately 2 000 new species have been incorporated into our collections. This surpasses the number of native species found in the entire United Kingdom. Most of these additions have been sourced from the wild, contributing substantively to research, education, and conservation initiatives.

7. Mandela Day: Ensuring that the legacy lives on through SU

Various SU environments again commemorated Mandela Day, being a poignant reminder of the significance of dedicating 67 minutes of our time to bring about positive transformation in our communities and society. Since this year is also the tenth anniversary of Nelson Mandela's passing in December 2013, the Nelson Mandela Foundation initiated the call to action "The legacy lives on through you" – a call that resonated with the entire SU community.

The Division of Social Impact, the Transformation Office, Employee Wellbeing, the Language Centre, Student Communities and the Students' Representative Council united in a **joint drive** aimed at two key objectives: sustainable food environments on campus, and the connection between staff and student wellbeing and active citizenship.

Staff and students [were invited to participate](#) in the following events:

Nelson Mandela Day 25 July 2023

10th Year of Remembrance "The Legacy Lives On Through You"

Fill a trolley | Build a Box | Give

30 June – 21 July



forward together · sonke siya phambili · saam vorentoe

Nelson Mandela Day 25 July 2023

10th Year of Remembrance "The Legacy Lives On Through You"

Staff and Student Wellness Experience

Venue: Endler Foyer, Conservatorium, Stellenbosch University
Time: 11:00am – 14:00pm



forward together · sonke siya phambili · saam vorentoe

Nelson Mandela Day 25 July 2023

10th Year of Remembrance "The Legacy Lives On Through You"

BASC Sandwich Drive

"67 Sandwiches in 67 Minutes"

Venue: Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University



forward together · sonke siya phambili · saam vorentoe

Nelson Mandela Day 26 July 2023

10th Year of Remembrance "The Legacy Lives On Through You"

Knitting Circle (Tygerberg Campus)

"Knitting items in commemoration of Nelson Mandela"

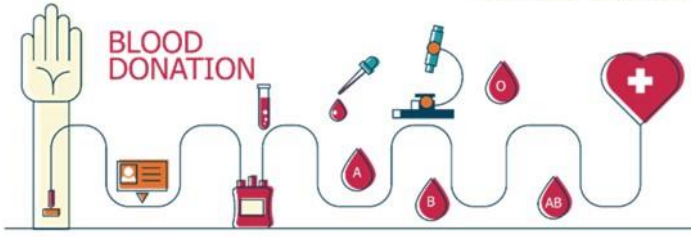
Venue: Medicine and Health Sciences Library
Time: 12:00pm – 16:00pm



forward together · sonke siya phambili · saam vorentoe

Nelson Mandela Day 27 July 2023

10th Year of Remembrance "The Legacy Lives On Through You"



SAVE LIVES DONATE BLOOD

forward together · sonke siya phambili · saam vorentoe

For our **Mandela Day lecture** on 26 July, Prof Thuli Madonsela delivered the keynote address, after which a student panel reflected on the lived experiences of students in relation to food insecurity on campus.

Facilities Management, in turn, dedicated their time and energy to **the Stellenbosch police station**. Along with a few service providers, they repaired pipes, toilets, basins, tiles and paving at the station, cleaned cells, walls and floors, and attended to the gardens. The team also restored window frames, installed new glass panes, cleaned and repaired gutters, and repainted where necessary. They even went the extra mile by delivering a comprehensive structural engineer's report that could be submitted to the Department of Public Works, advocating for essential building maintenance.

8. Employee wellbeing

In the past few months, we continued our efforts to help maximise **organisational wellbeing**.

Among others, team development activities were hosted for the Disability Unit (May) as well as the Desmond Tutu TB Centre, Clinical Anatomy and the Division of Molecular Biology and Human Genetics on Tygerberg campus (July). These focused on team resilience, facilitating critical conversations and self-care strategies.

In addition, the Discovery Wellness Experience was held at the Stellenbosch Business School and the Faculty of AgriSciences (May), the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences and Facilities Management (June) and as part of the University's Mandela Day activities (July). The experience entails health screenings to warn employees who may be at risk of developing conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. At the same time, it offers us an indication of the overall health of our staff.

In terms of **physical wellbeing**, SU's staff soccer and netball teams actively take part in monthly competitions in the varsity league. This ongoing participation serves as crucial preparation for the University Sport South Africa (USSA) Staff Sport Association tournament scheduled for October 2023. The tournament will be hosted by the University of the Western Cape, and our teams are hard at work to represent our university with excellence.

9. INU summit in Japan discusses universities' role in a changing global context

As indicated earlier in this report, I attended the summit of the International Network of Universities (INU) in Hiroshima, Japan, in early August 2023. The event was themed "The role of universities in internationally changing political and social contexts".

Senior leaders from SU were in attendance along with their peers from James Madison University (United States), the European University Viadrina Frankfurt and Osnabrück University (both in Germany), Hiroshima University (Japan), Malmö University (Sweden), Parahyangan Catholic University (Indonesia), the University of Rovira i Virgili (Spain) and Universidad Nacional del Litoral (Argentina).

University leaders were reminded of the importance of international collaboration and their role in advancing the public good. Participants discussed universities' role beyond education and research, namely as drivers of social change, protectors of democratic rights and freedom of speech as well as advocates for social justice in often complex political settings.

The summit marked the 25th anniversary of INU and coincided with the commemoration of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the activities encapsulated in this report, it is clear that a thriving SU is key to a thriving region and ultimately a thriving country. Our contribution to advance the overall wellbeing of our communities and the development of the country through science and research is irrefutable. We are firmly rooted in Africa, but have an undeniable global reach.

CONTRIBUTORS

The Rector's Management Report was compiled by the Executive Communication support team in collaboration with Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof Wim de Villiers, Mohamed Shaikh, executive manager in the Rectorate, as well as Melissa Douman, manager of Executive Communication. Editing and translation services were coordinated by the SU Language Centre and provided by their collaborator Hendrien Swanepoel. We also acknowledge the following contributors, listed by SU responsibility centre:

Learning and Teaching: Prof Deresh Ramjugernath, Dr Antoinette van der Merwe, Dr Karin Cattell-Holden, Claudia Swart-Jansen van Vuuren, Charmaine van der Merwe, Dr Nicoline Herman, Dr Gert Young, Dr Jean Farmer, Johara Khan, Dr Hanelie Adendorff, Dalene Joubert, Dr Sonja Strydom, Magriet de Villiers, Morris Samuels, Dr Vernita Beukes, Dr Arné Binneman, Tania Botha, Madelé du Plessis, Selene Delport, Fatima Halday, Faika Haroun, Stembele Johnson, Anne-Mari Lackay, Susan Lotz, Michelle Pieters, Dr Rose Richards, Helga Sykstus, Dr Alta van Rensburg, Dr Kim Wallmach, Miné de Klerk, Lizzie Witbooi, Yeki Mosomothane, Thulani Hlatswayo, Anele Mdepa, Spurgeon-Haddon Wilson, Dr Elmien Sinclair, Elmarie Kruger, Dr Marcia Lyner-Cleophas, Michelle Munro, Dr Jill Ryan. Compiled by Maretha Joyce and Lynne Rippenaar-Moses

Registrar: Dr Ronel Retief, Gerhard Lipp, Dr Celeste Nel, Ashmind Daniels, Farah Fredericks, Anne Havemann-Serfontein, Freek Truter, Cerwyn Majiedt, Salot Hanekom, Penny van der Bank, Charmaine Wing, Che Bermosky, Felecia van Rooi, Robert Young, Jonathan-Dale Blanckenberg

Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies: Prof Sibusiso Moyo, Prof Johann Mouton, Maryke Hunter-Hüsselmann, Sibusiso Lukhele

Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel: Prof Nico Koopman, Dr Craig Thompson, Dr Lynne Julie, Dr Haidee Williams, Dr Jo-Anne Kirby, Dr Ryno Botha, Dr Pierre Viviers, Valdene Southon, Ulrich Wolff, Ricky Brecht, Johannes Adams, Elvandre Galant, Marietjie Oelofsen, Natasha Coltman, Awethu Fatyela, Katlego Letlonkane, Shanté Neff, Dr Zethu Mkhize, Renee Hector-Kannemeyer, Chevaan Peters, Jubelian Korkie, Saartjie Botha, Candice Andries, Dr Leslie van Rooi, Joanne Williams