

BI0: Stellenbosch University Rector and Vice-Chancellor Professor WJS de Villiers

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Prof Wim de Villiers (58) is Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University (SU), Vice-Chairperson of Universities South Africa (USAf) and a Council Member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU).

He was appointed to his SU position by the institution's Council in December 2014, and took office in April 2015, becoming the 12th person to lead Maties since it achieved formal university status out of Victoria College in 1918. He was previously Dean of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town, and is a Matie alumnus and medical doctor who also studied and worked in England and the USA for 21 years.

He was born in Stellenbosch on 26 September 1959, the youngest child of Prof AB de Villiers, who would later become Dean of Law at SU, and Mrs Gera de Villiers (née Klomp) of Kroonstad. He matriculated from Paul Roos Gymnasium in 1977 with top marks in the then Cape Province, and passed his MB,ChB at SU cum laude, receiving the Francie Van Zijl and Chancellor's medals for academic achievement.

Spreading his wings, De Villiers obtained a DPhil in Immunology at Oxford University, England, in 1995. He then went to America to gain more experience – at the University of Kentucky Medical Centre in Lexington. He later also obtained a master's degree in health-care management from Harvard University. "I was supposed to stay for 18 months, which became 18 years! But it was very valuable," he says.

De Villiers practised as a gastroenterologist and established himself as a respected researcher in the field. He was included in the publication *Best Doctors in America*, and held a number of senior positions at the University of Kentucky, including Head of Gastroenterology, and Administrative Head of the Good Samaritan Hospital.

"Then the pull of the fatherland became too strong to resist," and he accepted the Dean's post in Cape Town in July 2013. In April 2015 he started the next chapter of his career when he took up the position of Rector and Vice-Chancellor at SU.

"I have a long association with Stellenbosch, and am pleased to make a contribution to my alma mater. I come from far, but am also from here. I received a wonderful education and many opportunities thanks to SU. Now it is my responsibility to plough back," he says.

De Villiers sees SU as a mature university that is well positioned to be locally relevant yet globally competitive. He wants students to receive an excellent education that will give them a competitive advantage as graduates in a rapidly changing world.

He believes Maties should offer a student experience that is pleasant, welcoming and hospitable – in an inclusive environment. He is committed to continued transformation to address the inequalities of the past, and supports the University's Institutional Intent and Strategy, adopted in 2013.

De Villiers received a grant from the Crossley Foundation in recognition of his leadership at SU in 2015. He subsequently donated it to the Vlakke Bursary Fund, which he established at his inauguration as a form of redress and development for descendants of victims of removals in the 1960s and '70s from Die Vlakke, a neighbourhood that used to adjoin the town centre of Stellenbosch and SU.

In 2016, he was appointed to the Advisory Board of the international journal, *Gastroenterology*. He also received an honorary doctorate from Coventry University in recognition of his academic leadership and his work as doctor and researcher in medical science.

Prof De Villiers likes to stay fit. "I discovered marathons in my middle age and have run the 'Big 5' – Boston, New York, London, Chicago and Berlin". He also enjoys mountain biking and completed the Cape Town Cycle Tour in 2018 to raise funds for student bursaries. He is married to Catherine, and they have two daughters and a son – Katusha, Gera and Braam – as well as three grandchildren.