



Autumn Graduation 2025 Special Edition



UNCENSORED VOICES OF VICTORY:

*"FMS staff open up about their academic journey
and what comes next"*



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EDITOR:
ZANDILE MAHLOBO

EDITORIAL TEAM:
THULASIZWE NKOMO, SKHUMBUZO MDUNGE

IMAGES:
SBONELO DLAMINI, KHULASANDE TSHAYILE, DUT MULTIMEDIA –
MORGAN KISTEN

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EXECUTIVE DEAN'S MESSAGE

When I joined the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in 2020 as the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Management Sciences (FMS), top on of my priority agenda was to improve the faculty's high-level skills, expertise and capacity among both academic and support staff members. By character, the DUT, having emerged out of the merger of former Technikon Natal and Technikon ML Sultan is a young and less research-intensive university, and invariably therefore, capacity development is imperative for its future positioning in the sector. Without concerted efforts at improving staff qualifications, the FMS would continue to struggle at improving its postgraduate study programmes, supervisory capacity and research outputs, among other things.

As of 2020, indicators of performance for the FMS

were that only 36% of 126 academic staff held doctoral qualifications, and only 89 research output units were generated. In our 2030 FMS Research, Innovation and Engagement Strategy generated in 2020, we identified and prioritised, among other things: (a) 70% Academic Staff with PhD by 2030 (to be grown at 10% annually), and (b) a 10% Increment in Research Output Annually.

Ever since 2020, the number of academic staff members who have graduated at least from DUT enrolments with doctoral degrees has improved from one (2020), six (2021), two (2023), to 12 (2024). This drastic improvement happened because we have intentionally developed strategies, targets and initiatives to improve the status quo. Among the interventions that we have embraced include a doctoral staff support programme and

implementing the DUT staff study leave policy that has benefited numerous of our staff members.

This issue celebrates the academic achievements of staff members who went through the 2025 Autumn graduations of 2025, and in particular there were 6 academics who obtained their doctoral qualifications, one kitchen assistant who graduated with a postgraduate diploma, and 12 support staff members who graduated with a variety of qualifications that include Advance Diploma and Master's degrees. Five of the academics who graduated were happy to share their stories for this issue.

I hope that you will enjoy this inspirational publication.

Sincerely,

Prof Fulu Netswera
Executive Dean: Faculty of
Management Sciences

DR SANDILE H. MYENI

ACADEMIC

Department of Ecotourism

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences, Specialising in Hospitality and Tourism - DUT

Life story...

I am Dr Sandile Myeni, a 37-year-old academic, originally from Hluhluwe Ezibayeni, a rural community in northern KwaZulu-Natal. I am deeply proud of my roots, which have shaped my values, work ethic, and passion for community development. Growing up in a rural area came with its own set of challenges, but it also instilled in me a strong sense of resilience, responsibility, and a desire to uplift others through education. My childhood taught me the importance of hard work, humility, and staying grounded, qualities that continue to guide me in both my personal and professional lives.

Research interests...

My main research interests lie in tourism development, marketing strategies for small tourism enterprises, rural tourism, and sustainable tourism practices. I am particularly drawn to these areas because I believe tourism has great potential to drive inclusive economic growth, especially in underdeveloped and rural communities. My doctoral study focused on the effectiveness of marketing strategies employed by tour operators, which led to the development of a Marketing Strategy Effectiveness Model (MSEM). This work aims to empower small tourism enterprises, and inform evidence-based policies that can enhance tourism's role in local economic development.



Memorable moment at DUT...

One of the most memorable moments during my studentship at DUT was witnessing the growth and success of my students, both academically and professionally. I find immense fulfilment in seeing students I have mentored progress to postgraduate studies or establish successful careers in the tourism and hospitality sector. Another significant highlight was leading student involvement in major events such as the Comrades Marathon, which is an internationally recognized event that offered students real-world exposure and invaluable experiential learning opportunities. These experiences have reinforced my belief in the transformative power of teaching, mentorship, and meaningful community engagement.

What's next? ...

Achieving my PhD is not the end, but rather the beginning of a new chapter. "A dream does not die while the dreamer is still alive". This resonates deeply with me as I continue to pursue greater impact through research, mentorship, and community-driven innovation. My next steps include pursuing postdoctoral research, and publishing extensively in peer-reviewed journals. I also plan to collaborate on international research projects that promote sustainable and inclusive tourism development. In the long term, I aspire to become a professor and a research leader in the field of tourism. I am passionate about mentoring emerging scholars, influencing policy through research, and leading initiatives that support rural development across Africa. Continued learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and meaningful impact are at the core of my academic and professional visions.

DR LUNGELO P. FUNEKA

ACADEMIC
Department of Applied Management

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED
Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences, Specialising in
Public Relations and Communication - DUT

Life story...

I'm from Impendle in KwaZulu-Natal, Midlands – born and bred. I had little opportunity to be exposed to other places, but as a family, we had short trips to Pietermaritzburg and visited relatives in townships. School has always been a priority. My siblings and I worked very hard to meet the university entry requirements. As the firstborn amongst four children, I feel that I have to set a good precedent in terms of achieving your own goals in life. I grew up with very supportive parents, who were both not working, but made sure that we were taken care of. My mom would sew clothes and sell them at the month-end old-age grant pay points, where grannies came in large numbers to collect their payouts. My father had a tractor, and his work was seasonal. He would be hired to transport firewood and sand, and during the ploughing season, he was quite busy cultivating fields and harvesting. I'm grateful that they didn't use the excuse of not being employed to not provide for us. Instead, they ensured that my siblings and I were provided for, and our home was warm... which still is. Going home now for me is more like going to a place where I want to "escape" and relax. Nothing feels better than sleeping in my bed at home after a long time of being buried in work, especially research.

are in staff and students in higher education, mass media, and health communication. My PhD thesis focused on a multifaceted field called health communication, which interlinks with Public Relations because they both involve disseminating messages to the public. As such, I intend to contribute research outputs that focus on both Health Communication and PR.

Memorable moment at DUT...

I was employed by the institution as a lecturer in February 2020. When I went to class to teach the 3rd year students, I found out that they were the same group of students that I used for Focus Groups when I was collecting data for my Masters study in 2018. That was my "come-full-circle" moment because students spent at least half of the allocated class time letting me know how I inspired them during the focus groups, and how they intend to enrol for their Advanced Diploma the following year. When I felt demotivated during my PhD studies, I would often reminisce about this moment, and how many students looked up to me. Hence, I needed to work very hard and attain my PhD qualification.

Research interests...

My main research interests are Public Relations and Communication. Over the years the profession of Public Relations Practitioners was often mistaken with Journalism, and with the rise of social media influencers, most prospective students were discouraged from enrolling for a Diploma in Public Relations. I'm passionate about PR and Communications because it is a versatile field, with a formal qualification you can be an academic, a researcher, a freelancer or an entrepreneur. My other research interests

What's next? ...

I love and enjoy the academia, and now that I have reached this milestone, my eyes are set on becoming an Associate Professor. With the support that I have from my family, and colleagues, and the guidance from my mentor I will be able to achieve this dream. I often say, "My dreams aren't just pie in the sky", declaring that my dreams are not wishful thinking. I understand that I need to work very hard. However, I already have a foundation which is the PhD.

A portrait of Dr Yâchal du Plessis, a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blue graduation gown with a white stole. She is standing with her arms crossed, looking slightly to the side.

DR YÂCHAL DU PLESSIS

ACADEMIC

Department of Applied Management

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences, Specialising in
Public Relations and Communication - DUT

Life story...

My very existence was a surprise and a miracle. My mom was sterilised 6 years before she had me, and she gave birth to me when she was 41. This is where my unique name came from. I was born in Durban but lived most of my life in a small coastal town called Scottburgh.

Being raised by two parents who are literal contrasts — one creative and spontaneous, the other calm and methodical — shaped me into a bit of a paradox, and I carry both personalities with me.

My mom was never a traditional student. She was wild, full of energy, and couldn't sit still. She didn't complete Grade 9, but by 16, she was already working as an artist. She went on to become a successful commercial artist and worked with some of the biggest magazines in South Africa and abroad. She's fun, endlessly creative, and deeply compassionate, but she was also very strict when it came to pushing me to be my best. My dad was her opposite in many ways — calm, cool, collected, and extremely organised. He started at the bottom in a carpet company and worked his way up through sheer determination. He was strict too, but he had an incredible ability to connect with people. He was always approachable and had a quiet strength that made a big impact on me.

When I was seven, both my parents were called into Ministry. They were ordained and became full-time pastors in Scottburgh. From that point on, my childhood was rooted in community service. We spent most of our time serving others, and that shaped so much of who I am today.

Research interests...

I have always been naturally curious. If someone raises a topic in conversation that sparks my attention, I'll go research it just to understand it better, especially from a social or human-centred perspective. I have so many questions about the world — from why the sky is blue to how organizations function — and I think of myself as an explorer of knowledge. I genuinely feel compelled to understand how things work, both big and small. I can wake up in the middle of the night because I watched an episode of The Big Bang Theory and suddenly need to understand the latest research on black holes. Or I'll be watching a true crime documentary and next thing you know, I'm deep-diving into scholarly articles on the frontal cortex of serial killers.

Memorable moment at DUT...

For me, it's not just one moment; it's more like a continuous reel of highlights. Every interaction I have with colleagues, every workshop, every new engagement with staff or students — those are all memorable in their different ways. I genuinely believe that knowledge is something collective, something we build together. I try to learn something new from every person I meet,

because that's how growth happens — through connections, conversations, and shared insight. Just the other day in a curriculum design session, I learned from a Chemical Engineering colleague about ways to boost neuroconnections in children to support their cognitive and emotional development. As a mom of two boys, I was completely fascinated and left there empowered!

What's next? ...

During the 5 years I did my PhD, I didn't really take a vacation; so, the next thing is to enjoy my upcoming vacation — my reward to myself. After that, my focus will shift back to continuing my research, publishing, and working towards promotion to Senior Lecturer. I'm also excited to explore roles that stretch me professionally — opportunities that allow me to add value beyond traditional teaching and learning, whether through leadership, innovation, or interdisciplinary collaboration.

DR SANDILE MKHIZE

ACADEMIC

Department of Marketing and Retail

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Doctor of Philosophy in Marketing - UKZN

Life story...

Dr Sandile Mkhize is a dedicated academic, marketing scholar, and committed family man. He is an only child on his mother's side, and the eldest of three siblings from his father's side. After the recent loss of his younger brother, he now has one sister. He is a husband and father to two boys, and a strong Christian whose faith anchors both his personal and professional lives.

Prior to joining the academia, Dr Mkhize built a successful 14-year career in industry. He worked with a diverse range of organisations including Boxer Superstores, KZN Wildlife, Deloitte Consulting, Coca-Cola Beverages Africa (formerly ABI), and Sasfin Bank. These roles helped him develop deep expertise in sales, communication, and project management — skills that continue to influence his teaching, supervision, and research.

Seeking a new challenge after more than a decade in the corporate world, he returned to his academic roots. He holds a B. Com in Marketing and Economics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), where he also completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Marketing. This paved the way for his Master's degree, and ultimately, a PhD in Marketing.

Today, Dr Mkhize combines academic research with practical experience to contribute meaningfully to the fields of marketing, education, and sustainability. I'm a township boy through and through, born and raised in Imbali, a township in Pietermaritzburg. My upbringing was rooted in the township. I attended local township schools throughout my basic education. My mother worked as a receptionist at a newspaper company, and I lost my father in 2001. Like many others from similar

backgrounds, I pursued my studies through NSFAS funding, which played a crucial role in getting me to where I am today.

Research interests...

My main research interests lie in green marketing and sustainable marketing. I've always been drawn to issues around sustainability; and marketing gives me the lens to explore how consumer behaviour can be aligned with broader environmental and social goals.

Memorable moment at DUT...

Joining DUT after five years in private higher education (including stints at MANCOSA and Rosebank College) was a major career milestone. Beyond that, getting actively involved in teaching and learning innovation, particularly around creativity and the Design Thinking project, stands out as a key highlight. It's been rewarding to push the boundaries of traditional classroom engagement.

What's next? ...

I'm passionate about teaching, learning, and research. The next step for me is to focus on publishing more, especially in the field of sustainable marketing. I want to contribute meaningfully to marketing research, with a strong focus on sustainability, and the role it plays in shaping consumer choices and business strategy.



DR CAROLINE OLANREWaju

ACADEMIC

Department of Public Management and Economics

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences, Specialising in
Public Administration - DUT



Life story...

Carol as I am called by everyone, comes from Nigeria in West Africa. As a child, I remember moving from one place to another approximately every three (3) years by virtue of my father being in the Nigerian Army. I moved around within and outside Nigeria so much frequently that I cannot categorically say I am Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba (the major ethnic groups in Nigeria). I would rather say I am a blended citizen of Nigeria as I am Igbo by ancestors, Hausa by predominant location, and currently married to a Yoruba man. In the midst of all the movements, my parents ensured that I had a steady and stable education. I attended a military primary school, and went on to a military boarding school for my secondary education. I enjoyed childhood so much; I loved the challenge of a new family location, having to be with a new set of people and confronting a new language. I enjoyed school as well (after the first 2 years, of course). Childhood brings so many great memories.

Research interests...

I graduated with my first degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences and worked as a community pharmacist for a couple of years. During that time, I went on medical outreaches and other community engagements. I was drawn to and got very passionate about helping people. By divine direction, I modified my career path to pursue a Master's in Disaster Management from the University of the Free State, South Africa, and enjoyed it immensely. It was my calling. During that period (2012 -2013), there was a devastating flood disaster in Nigeria, and I witnessed several others in South Africa. So,

I decided to research flood disasters and their health implications in Nigeria for my Master's dissertation. I am happy to say that the journal article that came out of my dissertation has over 150 citations currently. I decided to continue on the path of flood management for my PhD because I believed there was a way to reduce the sufferings and pains of people affected by flood disasters in Africa; and using eThekwin as a case study was an ideal choice. With the tenacious guidance of my supervisor, Dr Maliga Reddy, I was able to research and offer solutions, thus achieving my goal.

Memorable moment at DUT...

At DUT, I lectured in Disaster Management with Dr Mal Reddy as the program coordinator. Every moment of mentoring under her was memorable. I would say, my highlights are the integrated assessments with the students. We visited one disaster-affected community within and outside eThekwin every year. I remember my first visit to Ugu District Municipality after the 2022 flood disaster. The entire experience is a memory I will always refer to.

What's next? ...

I love and enjoy the academia, and now that I have enjoyed research so much; I do not want to leave it. I will keep digging deeper. I want to see how the framework I developed with the guidance of my supervisor can be implemented, not only in South Africa, but in Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan African countries.



NOMPUMELELO MNCUBE

Lab Technician

Department of Hospitality and Tourism

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Advance Diploma in Hospitality Management
DUT

Life story...

I'm a 52-year-old widow, and a proud mother of three, two of whom are teenagers. I currently live in Musgrave, and work at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism as a Laboratory Technician. My main responsibilities involve managing all consumable and non-consumable purchases for both teaching and learning as well as the department's business unit.

My academic journey began right here at DUT in the year 2000 when I received my Diploma in Catering Management. That qualification was the foundation of everything I've become, both professionally and academically. I come from a family with deep roots in education. My late grandmother was a school principal, and my mother and all her siblings were teachers. As the firstborn and only girl in a family of three siblings (one of my brothers is now late), I was raised in an environment where hard work, discipline, faith, integrity and education were strongly valued. Those values have stayed with me throughout my life and still guide me today.

Source of inspiration...

My greatest inspiration has been my children. I want them to see firsthand that no dream is out of reach if you're willing to work for it. After losing my husband, I became a single mother, managing the home, raising three children, and working full-time. One of my proudest joys is my 17-year-old daughter, who wants to become a gynaecologist after completing Grade 12. I often tell her that, "There will be two doctors in this family—you and me." That's the vision I hold in my heart. Balancing work and study has been quite challenging. Due to the demanding nature of my job, I'm unable to take any vacation, even for exams or study time. But with God as my strength, and through perseverance, I've managed to push through. The sacrifices have been many, but the reward is fulfilling and satisfactory.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

Walking across the stage on 22 May 2025 to receive my Advanced Diploma in Hospitality Management was a defining moment. It wasn't just about the qualification; it was about reclaiming a part of myself. That moment made me reflect on how far I've come, and how much more I still want to achieve. It reminded me that my age, circumstances, or challenges don't define me, but my determination does. It shifted my perspective from "getting through" life to building a legacy of courage and learning.

The supporters...

Knowing Professor Erasmus Mnguni was a turning point in my academic journey. His encouragement gave me the push I needed to continue when I felt unsure. My DUT colleagues have also shown immense support, which I deeply appreciate. However, the truest support has come from my children. They are my reason, my why, and my fuel. I want them to see that life can be hard, but through prayer, purpose, and perseverance, you can rise above anything.

What's next? ...

I'm currently pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration at the DUT Business School. My next steps include completing my MBA, and, by God's grace, I plan to pursue a PhD after that. My goals align strongly with DUT's ENVISION2030 strategy, which focuses on innovation, lifelong learning, and impactful growth. I am proud to be a part of a university that values creativity, transformation, and the pursuit of excellence. Through my journey, I strive to live out DUT's Living Values: honesty, integrity, professionalism, accountability, and respect. I believe I am a true example of the saying, "Imfundo ayikhulelwa" — education knows no age. My story is a testimony that it's never too late to dream again, and to rise, no matter how hard the journey may be. If I can do it, so can you!



STHABISO MAKHANYA

Faculty Research Administrative Assistant
FMS Postgraduate Office

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Postgraduate Diploma in Public Relations and Communication
Management - DUT

Life story...

Sthabiso Makhanya was born and bred in uMlazi township. In my early life dominoes, honestly, there were fewer opportunities. I had to create my own. The challenges that I faced were designed to break me, but I turned each obstacle into a stepping stone.

Source of inspiration...

Becoming a Reputation/Image consultant has been an inspiration to further my studies as Public Relations personnel. I believe that the best corporate companies, organizations and public figures' longevity is determined by reputation management. How do I balance work and academics? Simple, have clear priorities. Ensure you surround yourself with winners to become one.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

The following quote changed my worldview completely: "Life doesn't stop when you fail your semester; life stops when you stop trying". Quite frankly, you already have the necessary capabilities to conquer; you just need to capitalise on what you already have at your disposal.

The supporters...

My family, friends and colleagues supported me the most during my academic journey.

What's next? ...

Master's degree loading!



NOMZAMO NGCOBO

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Department of Entrepreneurial Studies and Management

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Advance Diploma in Public Administration, Specialising in Public Administration - DUT

Life story...

My name is Nomzamo Ngcobo. I currently serve as an Administrative Assistant in the Department of Entrepreneurial Studies and Management at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). I recently graduated with an Advance Diploma in Public Administration, and I am now pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration. Born and raised in the rural area of Ndwedwe, KwaZulu-Natal, I experienced a childhood filled with challenges that often made me doubt my future. Coming from a disadvantaged background where education was not a priority, many believed I wouldn't succeed. Despite the pain of losing loved ones and enduring numerous hardships, I found strength in my faith. The teachings of Shembe, and the belief that "when the time is right, the Lord will make it happen" have been my guiding light, leading me to where I am today.

Source of inspiration...

What inspired me to pursue my studies was securing an internship at this university. It was here that I began to believe in the value of my education. Being surrounded by educated individuals and immersed in an academic environment inspired me. Networking and engaging with knowledgeable people reinforced my belief that every day offers an opportunity to learn. Living among individuals who are more knowledgeable or accomplished than I, has taught me to learn as much as possible. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity provided by the YES Program at this university. Lastly, being the first person in my family to graduate has been the most inspiring achievement, showing others that success is possible despite challenges. The friends I associate with have also influenced me to pursue my studies for better opportunities. Balancing work and academics is not easy, but when you set goals, and inspired by the people around you, it becomes more manageable. Therefore, to accomplish certain things in life, it's essential to choose the people you surround yourself with.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

One significant moment during my studies that changed how I see myself and my future goals was when I successfully managed both work and academics. Balancing these responsibilities proved to me that I am capable of handling multiple tasks, and that my education is valuable. It also helped me to develop new skills, and boosted my confidence. Additionally, taking on the role of a group leader in class discussions and projects sparked my interest in teaching and mentoring. This experience made me realize that I enjoy guiding others and sharing knowledge, and I began to see myself in a future teaching role.

The supporters...

Throughout my academic journey, I have been fortunate to receive unwavering support from individuals who believed in me and my potential. One such person is my high school teacher, who has been a constant source of encouragement from my high school days to the present. Her dedication to breaking generational curses through education profoundly inspired me. She not only imparted knowledge but also instilled in me the belief that education is a powerful tool for transformation. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to Mr. Sihle Ngubane from the Housing Department at the Durban University of Technology. His generous assistance with my registration fee enabled me to pursue my studies without the burden of financial constraints. His support was instrumental in my academic journey, and I will be forever thankful. These individuals have played pivotal roles in my life, and their belief in me continues to fuel my aspirations. Their support has not only facilitated my education but has also inspired me to give back to my community, and uplift others as I have been uplifted.

What's next? ...

My next step is to balance work and academics effectively, pursue my studies with dedication, expand my professional network, and continue learning to grow both personally and professionally.



GARRETH AUGUST

RESEARCH OFFICER
DUT Business School

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED
Degree of Master of Management Sciences, Specialising in
Human Resources Management - DUT

Life story...

I'm Garreth August, currently serving as a Research Officer at a Business School. I hail from a place called Sydenham Heights, a close-knit community that played a big role in shaping who I am. My childhood was wonderful — simple, vibrant, and free. I grew up in a time before smartphones and social media, so real-world interactions were everything. We had a neighbourhood full of kids my age, which meant my circle of friends was always diverse and full of energy. It was a time of creativity, outdoor play, and learning from people around me — experiences I truly cherish.

Source of inspiration...

I've always been passionate about learning, and I saw education as a powerful way to not only grow personally, but also to contribute meaningfully to my field. Balancing work and academics wasn't always easy, but it taught me discipline and resilience. I managed by setting clear priorities, being organised with my time, and staying committed to both roles. I treated study time with the same seriousness as work hours, and over time, that routine became a habit.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

Was there a moment during your studies that really changed how you see yourself or your goals?

Not really, there wasn't one big "aha" moment, but more of a series of quiet realisations along the way. It's like gradually adjusting a lens; the picture becomes clearer over time. Each challenge, deadline, and discussion nudged me forward, shaping my direction without completely rewriting it. My goals didn't flip overnight, but they definitely evolved and were sharpened by experience rather than epiphany.

The supporters...

Definitely my mum and supervisor.

What's next? ...

I want to keep writing sharing ideas, contributing to research, and hopefully making a meaningful impact in my field.



NOKWETHEMBA KAYLA RADEBE

FINANCE ASSISTANT

FMS Postgraduate Office

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Postgraduate Diploma in Information and Corporate Management - DUT

Life story...

I was born and raised in a small town called Eshowe in Northern KwaZulu Natal. I had a really supportive upbringing. My family created a warm stable environment where education was highly valued.

Source of inspiration...

My inspiration to pursue my studies really came from the way I was brought up where education was emphasised, and I then saw it as a path for growth and better opportunities. Balancing work and academics had its own challenges, but I learnt to manage and organise my time carefully, and also lean on my support system when needed.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

When I started getting the hang of managing my time carefully while balancing work and

academics, I realised I could achieve more than I initially thought. That moment gave me the confidence to push myself further, and set bigger goals, knowing that with discipline and focus, I could handle whatever came my way.

The supporters...

Definitely my family. Their support and encouragement have been the foundation of my academic journey. They always believed in me, pushed me to do my best, and reminded me of the importance of education. It gave me great comfort knowing they have got my back, especially during challenging times.

What's next? ...

My next goal is to pursue my next level of education. I am eager to deepen my knowledge and skills, and I also believe furthering my education will open up new opportunities for my personal and professional growth.



NTOBEKO THIBA

GEN ED ENTREPRENEURSHIP ADMINISTRATOR

Department of Entrepreneurial Studies and
Management

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Degree of Master of Management Sciences in Business
Administration - DUT

Life story...

Ntobeko Thiba is a Durbanite, born and raised here. I am a last born. I was raised in Chesterville, and after losing both my parents, I moved to KwaMasxha where I continued my schooling until I completed Matric in 2015. I went to do IT at Coastal College, and after that, I enrolled at DUT Midlands Campus where I did my undergrad in Business Administration. My childhood was really beautiful, and I was fortunate enough to be raised by foster parents who allowed me to have options for what I wanted. I owe a lot to them.

Source of inspiration...

My high school dream was to be a teacher or an entrepreneur. When I was in my third year, I knew I did not want to do a PGCE, so the best option was to further my studies so that I could be a lecturer in entrepreneurship. And thank God, everything aligned, and I am waking up to live my dream.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

Was there a moment during your studies that really changed how you see yourself or your goals?

Yes, when I lost my foster parents in 2017. I was a first year in the Midlands, a city I knew no one, and had not received assistance from the financial scheme. I knew then that I would need to work extra hard and create a niche so that I can stand out. This also motivated me to work extra hard so that I could secure myself.

The supporters...

My maternal family members were very supportive during my academic journey. Lana-Ann Brady and the entire department were a lighthouse in this journey.

What's next? ...

Definitely a PhD. That's my focus.



NOKUPHILA BIYELA

**FACULTY RESEARCH ADMINISTRATIVE
ASSISTANT**

FMS Postgraduate Office

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Degree of Master of Management Sciences in Business
Administration - DUT

Life story...

My name is Nokuphila Yvonne Nomthandazo Fezile Biyela. I was born on 7 March 1984 to Rose Gugu Myeni and the late Thulani Ntombela, in the rural township of Nteneshane in Empangeni, under the chieftaincy of Manzimeleni.

I am the first-born daughter of my parents, followed by four girls and one boy. I grew up as a loner, mostly isolated, because other children used to mock me for the scalded skin on my arm. They said it looked like snakeskin. They didn't want to choose me to play with because they said my arm was scary. But my grandmother, Thembalinye Biyela (MaMhlongo), who has since passed on, took care of me whenever I cried. That created a deep bond between us. I miss her so much. She was a woman of prayer and taught us to pray in both good and bad times. I entrusted my dreams to God through prayer, and by giving offerings at church every Sabbath.

I started school at Nteneshane School when I was nine years old, because I had been badly scalded on my right hand, which delayed my learning. I struggled with writing and keeping up, but my grandmother believed in education, and wanted me to become a social worker. She cared for me in hospital, and when I improved, she took me to school. The doctors even issued a certificate to apply for a disability grant because of my injury, but my grandmother refused to apply, saying if I received a grant, I would never be able to work in government. She used to say, "I want you to sit in an office one day, typing on a computer like the ladies we see at welfare."

I wouldn't say life was hard. I was well fed and cared for, and my grandmother taught us to accept what we had, and not compare ourselves with others. For her, education was the key to a better life.

I took that to heart and went to school with determination, even though the kids often teased me about my scarred skin and the dark complexion on my face. At times, I was even afraid to look at myself. My family later relocated to Mtubatuba after witnessing the traumatic killing of my father, who was shot dead in front of us at

home. At Mtubatuba, I started Grade 6. In Grades 8 and 9, I failed because I couldn't finish my exam papers on time due to my infirm hand. The teachers at the new school didn't know about my condition until Miss Nkala called me into the staff room, and asked why I couldn't complete my exams even though I wasn't academically weak. That was when I opened up, and she helped by speaking to the Principal. They accepted my medical documentation, and extended my examination time. From then on, I never repeated a grade again, and went on to complete matric. It was a joyous occasion at home; my grandmother was proud of me. She had saved R100 from her pension for me, even though it wasn't much, to help me pursue my studies. I tried doing odd jobs, and worked at Shoprite, but I longed to go to the university. I registered with UNISA, but couldn't afford the tuition and resources. Later, I worked at Sanlam in Stanger. I also have two children: a son, Lindani Ngema, and a daughter, Palisa Ngema.

Source of inspiration...

What pushed me most to study was the situation at home. No one in our family had ever gone to university, and I wanted to break that cycle, not because we were stupid, but because of poverty. I used to dream of wearing a red graduation gown. I once walked along the road, and saw a picture in the newspaper of someone wearing a graduation gown, I took it and kept it at home and said, "One day I too will be like this... I will have a car and a beautiful house with a swimming pool."

And indeed, I broke the education curse at home, and wore a graduation gown. In 2019, I obtained a Diploma in Marketing, in 2021 an Advanced Diploma in Marketing, in 2022 a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration, and in 2025, I obtained my Master's in Business Administration. It wasn't easy, especially during my diploma studies, as I didn't have NSFAS funding, but I was supported by the DUT Alumni Office Bursary, which allowed me to continue. Studying while working was difficult. I had no social life. I couldn't attend family events or even go home often. I would work at DUT during the day and study at night. There were constant challenges like lack of

data and poor network coverage. I often had to stay at school until late just to complete my work. I also sought help from people who were more experienced than me, especially my supervisor, and they helped me a lot. My supervisor didn't go easy on us. He would wake us up in the middle of the night, saying, "Nokuphila, are you still sleeping? How can you sleep when you haven't finished your Master's?" Even my family members used to complain about me, saying I was no longer available, and that I was abandoning them. But the truth is, when you're doing research, you have to be unavailable so that you can complete what you are working on - and I, too, was helped by being unavailable; maybe that's why I am still single. Also, not having a permanent job or funding pushed me to work even harder because at DUT if you go over the allowed timeframe, you must pay, and I wouldn't have had the money to pay because of my difficult financial situation. I am currently employed on contract at DUT.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

Was there a moment during your studies that changed how you saw yourself or your goals?

Yes! It was when I completed Chapter Two of my dissertation. That chapter was my biggest challenge. It changed how I saw myself. Unlike in normal courses where you just write examinations and assignments, in research, you must read dozens of articles just to find a single sentence that supports your argument. That's when I felt like "isikhokho" and that I can be a lecturer at DUT. Yes, I said it, "Ntombi yakwaNkomo kayixoshwa!"

The supporters...

My biggest inspiration was my supervisor. He went above and beyond to mentor me, even calling late at night via MS Teams to assist. He always said, "Being from the rural area will not determine your future, use what you have, your mind and dedication, and then we will help with the rest." Another huge support came from our leadership and management, which organised postgraduate workshops for Master's and PhD students. Prof

Netswera, Prof Lourens, Prof Anwana, Dr Akindeji, Prof Mbandlwa, Prof Pencilar, Mr Seon, Prof Shalin, Dr Molokwane, Prof Harris, Dr Davis, Dr Omololo - all made it possible. If it weren't for them covering my fees, I wouldn't have made it. You can't focus on research when you are worried about the fees.

I remember my boss once said at a workshop, "If you are a researcher, you don't have time to explore anything outside research. You should be publishing, reading, and attending conferences." So, one day, even though I'm often nervous, I will stand up and present at a conference!

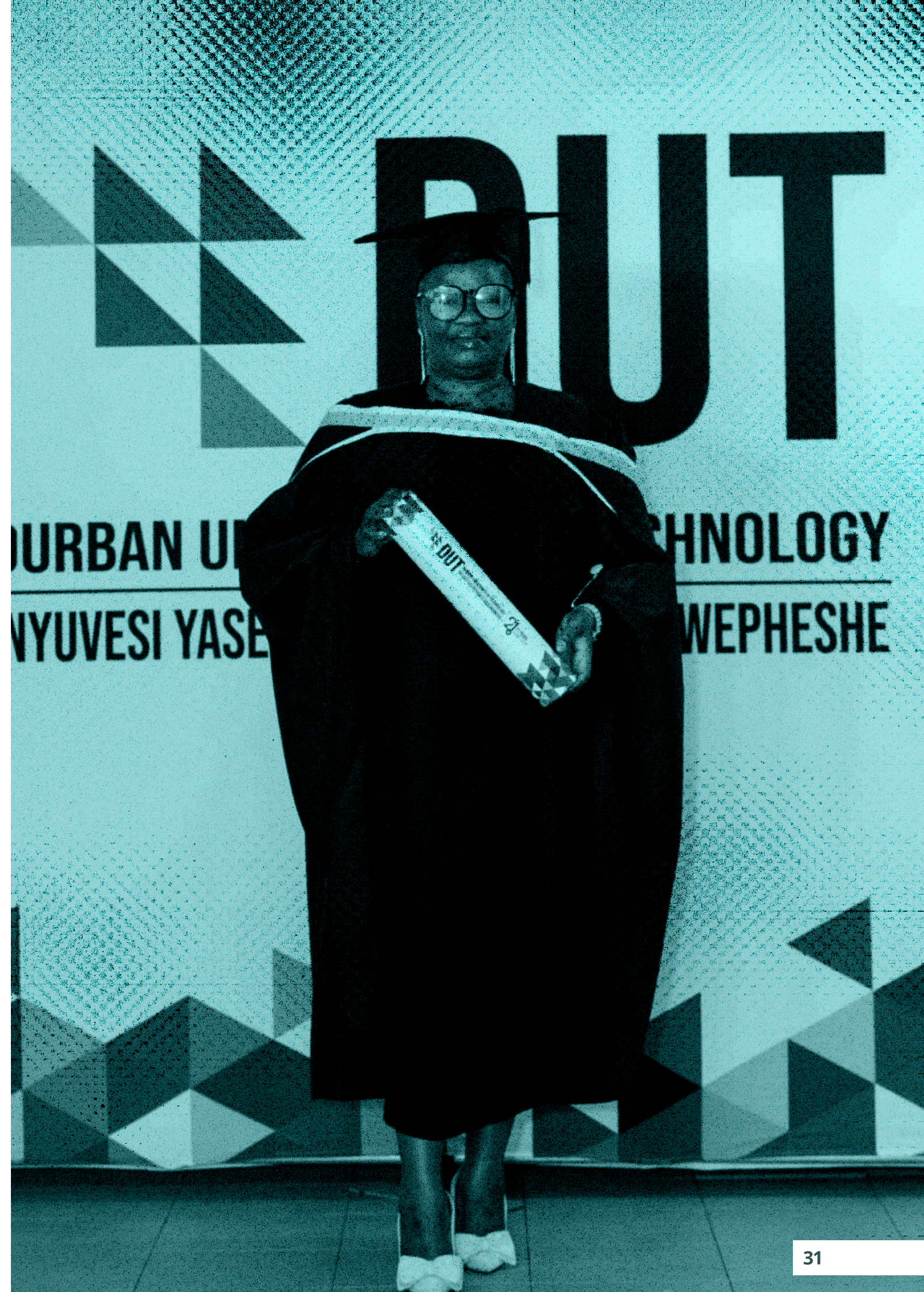
What's next? ...

The sky is no longer the limit; it's just the beginning! I'm preparing to start my PhD soon, and I'm actively seeking teaching opportunities at DUT. I want to gain lecturing experience so that I can soon be officially called Dr Biyela.

I thank God, uNyazi lwezulu kuNkulunkulu wokhokho bami, my ancestors, and my family for supporting me throughout my academic journey. My grandmother believed in me, and was with me spiritually. She played a vital role in raising me, and planting the seed that I would be an academic. To my children, who grew up without their mother always being around - Thank you. To my sisters: Sne, Sphelele, Nonto, and Sanele, and my uncle Menzi, who helped to raise my kids, I am forever grateful. To my colleagues who supported me, saying "It will all work out" ... it truly did. Thank you.

I say: IPHUPHO LOMUNTU ALIFI ESAPHILA, (A person's dream doesn't die while the person is still alive). I dedicate my qualification to intombi yako Njomane Mrs Biyela (My grandmother).

ELAMI LIFEZEKILE NAWWE LISENGAFEZEKA (My dream came true. Yours still can too!).





JERRYCO COETZEE

LAB ASSISTANT

Department of Hospitality and Tourism

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

Postgraduate Diploma in Hospitality Management –
DUT

Life story...

My name is Jerryco Coetzee. I was born and raised in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. I come from a humble background where values such as hard work, humility, and respect were instilled in me from a young age. My childhood was a blend of curiosity, community, and creativity, always eager to help in the kitchen, ask questions, and contribute in any way I could. Those early experiences shaped the foundation of who I am today: a passionate hospitality professional and lifelong learner.

Source of inspiration...

My inspiration came from a deep desire to grow beyond my circumstances, and to contribute meaningfully to the hospitality industry and my community. I've always believed that education opens doors, not just for oneself, but for those we serve and mentor along the way. Balancing work and academics is no easy feat, but discipline, time management, and the support of mentors and colleagues helped me juggle responsibilities. I saw every task, whether in the classroom or the kitchen, as an opportunity to improve myself and inspire others.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

Was there a moment during your studies that really changed how you see yourself or your goals?

Yes, one of the most defining moments for me was attending the graduation ceremonies of the students I've had the privilege to teach and tutor.

Seeing them walking across the stage, knowing the hard work we put in together, was incredibly fulfilling. I also began paying close attention to their pass rates, and when I noticed consistent improvement, it affirmed that my contribution mattered. Those moments made me realize that I was not just here to complete my own academic journey, but also to uplift others, and play meaningful roles in shaping future professionals in hospitality.

The supporters...

There have been several key individuals, but I must highlight my ex-HOD, Dr. E. Mnguni, who consistently offered honest guidance and mentorship. His faith in my potential pushed me to rise above self-doubt and approach my work with integrity and purpose. My colleagues and students also constituted a great source of motivation. Their passion and progress kept me stable and focused.

What's next? ...

This milestone is not a conclusion but a launchpad. I'm currently pursuing my Master's in hospitality management, focusing on research that bridges the gap between academia and industry, especially in areas like soft skills, sustainability, and innovation. I hope to grow further as an educator, contribute to curriculum development, and advocate for education that aligns more with the expectations of the industry.



THOKOZANI KHANYILE

FACULTY ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
DUT Business School

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED
Postgraduate Diploma in Management Sciences:
Business Administration

Life story...

I am Thokozani Khanyile AKA "TTK". I'm a first in almost every category in my family: first grandchild, first niece, and the firstborn child to my mom, and I grew up in Umlazi township. I was primarily raised by my mom, with my uncle taking on the role of a dad, and that relationship brought its own wonderful narrative. My childhood? A mix of "bubble child" energy spoiled? Maybe. Overprotected? Definitely. I was raised by uncles who meticulously ensured my safety, but despite that, I evolved into a person full of curiosity, asking questions, and deeply passionate about storytelling. That passion for narratives has remained with me my entire life, influencing my perspective on the world, and how I engage with it. Funny enough, I prefer writing over reading.

Source of inspiration...

It all began with my first job, where my female supervisors made one thing perfectly clear: "As a woman, education isn't just an option; it's your superhero cape." And honestly? They were more intimidating than approaching assignment deadlines, so I knew better than to disregard their advice. Juggling work and studies was challenging, and there were definitely times I questioned my choices in life, but I stayed on course by utilising planning tools. Prioritising my tasks, and relying heavily on support from my classmates. Most importantly, I consistently reminded myself of my reasons for starting. That purpose became my foundation, especially on the days when fatigue weighed the most.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

Was there a moment during your studies that really changed how you see yourself or your goals?

Yes, by the way, I'm not good at all in Maths, so when I was pursuing my advanced diploma, there was one module, Operations Management Techniques 4, that stood out. That module was one that I would have been content to pass with just a 50. For my DP, I scored exactly 40, and given my background, I had little hope. However, that weekend, with the materials shared by my

peers, I took it upon myself to study and managed to achieve a score that allowed me to pass at my first attempt; I didn't even need to sit for a supplementary examination. After accomplishing that, I loved the module and now have a desire to further explore Operations Management Techniques 5 because I genuinely enjoyed the module after teaching myself.

The supporters...

My children were my main supporters, yet even they had their reservations initially. When I started my studies, they wondered, "How will you manage this at your age?" Their curiosity was innocent but coated with concern. They had never seen me falter before. But life had other plans. There was one night that I will never forget. I came home after a brutal test, exhausted and deflated, and told them, "I failed." The silence that followed was louder than any scream. They said they had never heard me say those words. My son stared at me, wide-eyed, and whispered, "You failed? But you are never scared of anything!" In that moment, I realized failure wasn't just mine to carry; it was a shared deeming. My son stays awake at night every time I'm studying or doing my schoolwork. Even though he knows he can't help with it, his quiet solidarity became my anchor during late-night study battles. He once said, "I don't sleep anyway. Even though I can't help you with anything, it's like I'm there with you." That unspoken understanding of sharing the weight of my journey, even in silence, was a reminder that resilience isn't just personal; it's shared. My daughter, on the other hand, became my tiny but fierce "project manager." Prior to my examinations, she would make sure that I had everything I needed, and I didn't do housework anymore. She often said, "You've got this!" She would also double-check that I didn't worry about anything. Then she would tiptoe out of the room so as not to distract me.

What's next? ...

Having achieved this milestone, I'm fully committing to my Master of Business Administration (MBA) because, really, why stop now? This is merely the start of a larger journey, and I'm eager to discover what the next chapter holds for me.



NOZIPHO CELE

Faculty Research Administrative Assistant
FMS Postgraduate Office

QUALIFICATION OBTAINED
Bachelor of Laws (LLB) - UNISA

Life story...

My name is Nozipho Cele, a humble, purpose-driven woman, born and raised in KwaMachi near KwaShali in KwaZulu-Natal, deeply committed to serving others, and uplifting my community. I began my academic journey with a National Diploma in Taxation at DUT, but when my father passed away and my mother became seriously ill, I paused my studies to become her full-time caregiver. Determined to continue, I earned a Financial Accounting Diploma from Damelin (accredited by the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers), which laid a strong foundation for my career. I entered the workforce as a field work researcher at IPSOS Markinor, then took up a temporary position in DUT's Finance Office, a door that led to LexisNexis's Compliance Department, where I discovered my passion for law, and enrolled for a part time in an LLB through UNISA.

Committed to advancing my capabilities further, I completed UNISA's Advanced Programme in Risk Management, gaining strategic-level expertise in credit, market, operational, and business risk, which prepared me for executive-level responsibilities. Since then, I have built a dynamic career across sectors: contributing to UKZN's College of Medicine, coordinating projects at the Independent Electoral Commission, and leading stakeholders' engagements, postgraduate funding acquisition, and departmental financial management under the Wholesale & Retail Leadership Chair at DUT. I currently serve in DUT's Postgraduate Unit, leveraging my diverse experiences to support students and advance institutional goals.

Source of inspiration...

Pursuing my studies was inspired by a deep desire to grow personally and professionally. I have always believed in the power of education to open doors, and to better equip us to serve others. Working at DUT has allowed me to engage with a diverse range of people, from managing projects and contracts to now supporting postgraduate students at Master's and Doctoral levels. This environment constantly

challenges and motivates me to keep learning. Balancing work and academics has not always been easy, but it was possible through discipline, faith, and the support of my family and colleagues. I had to be intentional with my time, remain focused on my goals, and remind myself why I started. Recently obtaining my LLB has been a significant achievement, and a clear reminder that with dedication and God's grace, growth is always within reach.

Aligning who I am with where I am going...

Was there a moment during your studies that really changed how you see yourself or your goals?

Yes, there was a very defining moment during my LLB studies that shifted both how I see myself, and what I aim to achieve. I was in the middle of a demanding semester, working full-time at DUT, supporting postgraduate students, and still managing family responsibilities. One evening, while trying to complete an assignment after a long day, I sat back and asked myself, "Why am I doing this?" I was mentally and physically exhausted, but I realised in that moment that this was bigger than just academics. It was about growth, resilience, and setting an example, not only for my children, but for every student I had to support. That moment gave me clarity: my goal is not just to obtain degrees, but to become someone who uplifts others through knowledge, experience, and compassion. It deepened my passion for education and reminded me that I'm capable of more than I thought, not because it's easy, but because I refuse to give up. It also gave me a stronger sense of purpose in my work at DUT, especially now working closely with Master's and PhD students. I see myself not just as a professional, but as a guide and a support system for others on their own journeys.







The supporters...

Throughout my academic journey, I was deeply blessed by the support and inspiration of several important people. First and foremost, my family was my rock, especially my children and my husband, who encouraged me during challenging times, and reminded me to keep faith and stay focused. Their unwavering belief in me gave me strength on days when balancing work, studies, and home felt overwhelming. I have also been inspired by the dedicated colleagues and mentors at DUT who led by example, and continuously pushed me to grow professionally and personally. Their guidance and encouragement helped me to navigate complex projects and academic challenges. Lastly, my faith has been a constant source of inspiration. Trusting in God's plan and seeking His wisdom provided me with peace and perseverance throughout this journey. Together, these sources of support have been instrumental in helping me reach milestones like completing my LLB, and working with postgraduate students.

What's next? ...

Reaching this academic milestone has been a humbling and empowering experience, and it has only deepened my commitment to a lifelong learning. The next step for me is to continue my academic journey by furthering my studies in a field that complements both my legal background and my work in higher education. I am also focused on expanding my contribution to DUT, especially in supporting postgraduate students, and helping them to achieve their academic and research goals. Beyond that, I hope to use the knowledge I have gained to serve my community more meaningfully, and to be a role model for others who are balancing work, family, and studies. I believe there is always more to learn, and more ways to grow, and I am excited for what lies ahead.

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