

UJ INSIGHT

August/September 2025

Women Leading UJ's Future

Proudly South African institution
with women occupying some of the most
senior leadership positions.

STEM Leaders:

Driving Discovery at UJ

Breaking New Ground:

Prof Hassina Mouri's Global
Leadership in Geoscience

Prime time:

UJ alumna Mantsoe
Tsatsi's rise to radio

Power, Purpose and Progress:

Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka at UJ



20 YEARS
2005-2025

Our Future. Reimagined.



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Cover Feature



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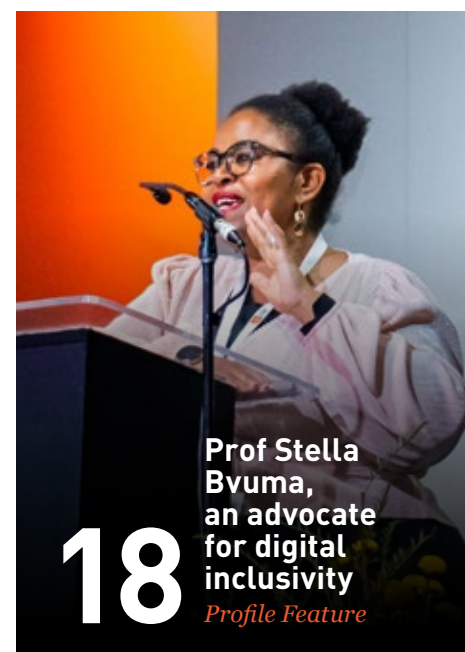
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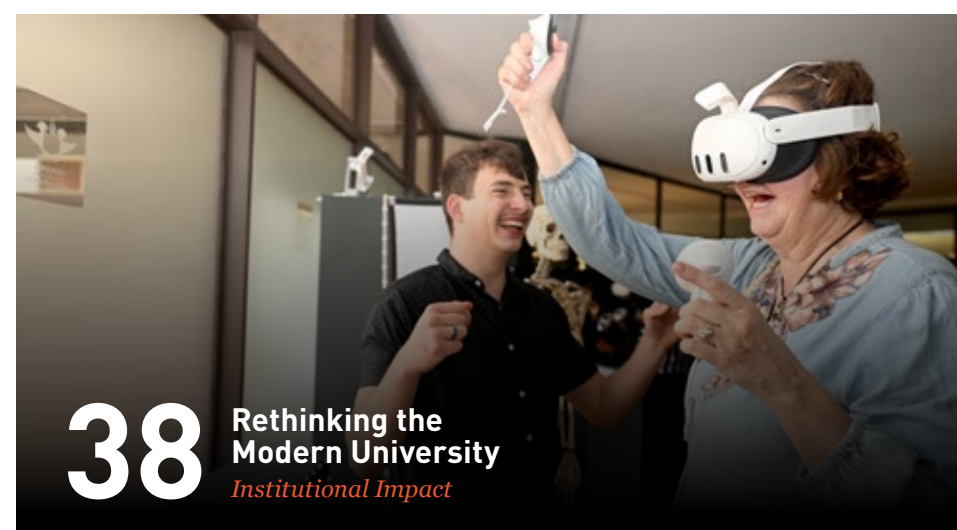
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Power, Purpose and Progress: Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka at UJ

It's been three years since your appointment as Chancellor of UJ. What has the journey been like, and how has it shaped your view of higher education today?

My three years as Chancellor of University of Johannesburg has been exciting and educational. I have learnt about the increase in the number of students who come from poor backgrounds, who in the last three have become formidable scholars. It is impressive to see how our university in 20 years has grown in research in the departments such as the department of Strategic Communications, Engineering, Economics Sciences all producing much needed knowledge and information and climbing in the ratings.

I have also become aware of the challenges we face when it comes to right sizing our higher education system which has grown in leaps and bounds fuelled by the funding of students by government and yet we are still relatively small for the size of our population and economy, which means as a country we have work to do.

What in your view is the most important thing that captures the place of education in our long journey of transformation and our hopes for a better future in South Africa?

We spent the best parts of our lives in schools and universities and that shapes us to be the people we become for the rest of our lives. So this time has to be spent productively and our educators have to play a critical role helping the young minds understand the world and play a role in reshaping it. We see our students from UJ stepping out and playing a critical role in South Africa and internationally. Universities



especially must always ensure they make an impact in society through their students and faculties and UJ does that very intentionally.

In our Health Sciences we deliver health care to the communities around us, we help schools improve their quality of learning and teaching through for example our Techno Lab that goes to assist in poor schools in rural areas. UJ has a transformative project in Limpopo Vhembe where all parts of the university use their expertise to address the various needs of that community. From infrastructure, connectivity, agriculture, legal services, education all and more are being serviced by the University of Johannesburg, improving the quality of life in a community that is remote and underserved.

Presiding over graduation is most definitely the best thing about being a Vice Chancellor. To be with students at the end of their successful time and years of hard work at UJ is priceless.

So education cannot only be gauged by what we do to our students but also what do to the people around us, ultimately education must impact those within and outside our campus.

Your role as a Chancellor of UJ is largely ambassadorial — presiding over graduations, engaging with alumni, and representing the University's interests. What have been the most rewarding aspects of this role?

Presiding over graduation is most definitely the best thing about being a Vice Chancellor. To be with students at the end of their successful time and years of hard work at UJ is priceless. I also enjoy lending a hand where I can, linking UJ with other institutions and initiatives that enriches the good work of the team at UJ. The good relationship between UJ and the UN that has led to the UNIPOD a technology initiative, partnership with the university of Warwick in the United Kingdom or participating in exciting work of women and literature, which contributes towards exposing great women writers. These initiatives makes my association with this university exciting and meaningful.

What makes your association with UJ special on a personal level? What sets the University apart in your view?

It is exciting to be surrounded by excellence and hard work of mostly much young and bright people. To think we are only 20 years old and

we have done so much, warms my heart. I can see that the University of Johannesburg will be a force for good in our communities for many years to come.

You've been a strong advocate for women's empowerment. Have we made enough progress in seeing women lead across sectors — or are we falling short?

As we celebrate 30 years of the Beijing declaration we can say we have come a long way. 30 years ago the world did not have a common set of policies that address Gender Equality. Since the adoption of such policies in Beijing, all around we began to see changes, most countries started from a very low point. We have seen more women in Politics, Commerce, Media, Academia, Religion and Civil Society. But with all of the progress, we still have a long way to go. We are not in a gender equal society yet, in some cases we even slipped backwards. Which means this is not the time to relax, we have to protect the gains we have made and fight against the litany of violations of women's rights. From Gender Based Violence, Unequal Pay, Under presentation, Poverty which are some of the common violations world over.



Gender-Based Violence remains an enduring crisis. In your view, what more must be done — and what role should universities play in this struggle?

The University has to remain focused on fighting Gender Based Violence protecting students and staff and doing research that seek solutions.

It is important for the University to have adequate policies to prevent , investigate and prosecute violations against women. There must also be independent authority to try cases of Gender Based Violence.

What role do you see for universities like UJ in not only responding to crises like climate change or inequality — but leading us into a more just and sustainable future?

As we are a teaching institution with an aim to share knowledge and transform lives, we can ensure our teaching does that at every turn. From our Funda Ujabule school when we start from Foundation Level to Grade 12 to our UJ academy where we teach STEM subjects to young people, to University undergraduates and Post Graduates. We have an extensive coverage where we can integrate teaching about essential values in every classroom. Honesty, Integrity, Kindness, Equality, Hard Work are some of the important values.

You've held many leadership roles across different sectors. In your view, what defines ethical, impactful leadership in today's South Africa — particularly in institutions like universities?

Our country needs Decisive and Ethical leaders. Leaders who care about the people they lead and who lead with humility and impact. Universities inspire us to be the best version of ourselves and our leaders at university can direct us to be ambitious and determined people.



Our country needs Decisive and Ethical leaders.
Leaders who care about the people they lead and who
lead with humility and impact.

From the Desk of the Vice-Chancellor



Professor Letlhokwa George Mpedi
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
University of Johannesburg

As we mark two decades of UJ's existence, we not only celebrate our achievements — we also recommit to our mission to transform and serve humanity through innovation and the collective and collaborative pursuit of knowledge.

The university of the future must be more than a transmitter of knowledge — it must be a builder of hope and a driver of equality. This magazine advances the vision of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) through storytelling, celebration, and reflection. It captures not only what we've achieved, but who we are and where we are going — towards a more inclusive and just future.

Twenty years ago, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) emerged as what some considered a bold experiment in transformation. The genesis was a merger that brought together different institutional legacies, student bodies, and philosophies, with one shared vision: to build a new kind of university – the type that reflected our democratic ideals, expanded access to higher education, and placed excellence and equity on equal footing.

In the decades since, UJ has grown into one of South Africa's most vibrant institutions — a university of the future, grounded in Africa and connected to the world. As Vice-Chancellor, I am honoured to lead this next chapter in our story — one marked by innovation, inclusion, and impact.

The global information ecosystem is changing rapidly, because of advancements in digital technologies. In today's fast-paced digital world, the increasing demand for unique user experiences means that we should find innovative ways to tell our own stories in a way that builds trust, transparency, and to create greater awareness of organisational success.

It gives me great pleasure, then, to introduce the inaugural edition of *UJ Insight* — a new platform for telling the stories that often live beyond headlines and rankings. Through this publication, we aim to spotlight the people, ideas and initiatives that shape UJ's identity and helping us realise our vision of becoming an international university of choice, anchored in Africa, dynamically shaping the future.

This first edition arrives at a moment of reflection and renewal. As we mark two decades of UJ's existence, we not only celebrate our achievements — we also recommit to our mission to transform and serve humanity through innovation and the collective and collaborative pursuit of knowledge. This magazine reflects that spirit. It highlights the achievements of our staff, students, researchers, and alumni — people who embody UJ's character of resilience, leadership and service.

Importantly, this inaugural edition is published during Women's Month, and many of its pages are dedicated to recognising the remarkable contributions of women across our campuses. From cutting-edge research and digital

innovation to student mentorship and public scholarship, these stories remind us that transformation is not only about systems — it is about the people who make those systems live and breathe. But this is a tribute that encompasses intersectionality. It is a celebration of excellence in all its forms, and an affirmation that talent knows no gender, background or boundary.

UJ's strength lies in its ability to imagine — and then realise — new ways of learning, living, and leading. Whether it's through our Strategic Plan 2035, our work on using technology for societal impact and sustainability, we remain focused on delivering education that is relevant, future-facing, and deeply human.

As I've often said in my engagements with staff and students: "The university of the future must be more than a transmitter of knowledge — it must be a builder of hope." This magazine is one more way we build that hope — through storytelling, celebration, and reflection. It captures not only what we've done, but who we are and where we're going.

Let *UJ Insight* serve as a conversation starter, a bridge between disciplines and divisions, and a testament to our shared purpose. Most of all, let it be a reminder that every lecture, every discovery, and every graduate is part of a much larger story — a story that says education matters, and that through it, we can shape a better tomorrow.

Thank you for walking this journey with us.

Professor Letlhokwa George Mpedi
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
University of Johannesburg

Women Leading UJ's Future

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) is home to a powerful cohort of women who hold senior academic leadership positions. As Executive Deans, they not only advance scholarship and research in their disciplines but also embody the University's commitment to transformation, inclusivity, and excellence.

Professors Annie Temane (Faculty of Health Sciences), Nadine Petersen (Faculty of Education), and Annah Moteetee (Faculty of Science) and Kammila Naidoo (Faculty of Humanities) represent a new generation of academic leaders whose influence extends beyond their faculties. Their leadership journeys are marked by resilience, mentorship, and a determination to create space for women in higher education.

Collectively, they are shaping UJ's future — inspiring students and colleagues alike, while ensuring that the University remains a place where women's voices, expertise, and vision are integral to its growth and impact.



Prof Annie Temane

Executive Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences

My passion has always been rooted in academia—teaching, supervising students, and conducting research. I commenced my leadership journey as Head of the Department of Nursing in 2017. My journey shifted from lecturing to leadership, first as Vice Dean for Research and Innovation in 2020, and then as Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences in 2024. These experiences have taught me the power of leading by example.

I am deeply grateful to the academic women leaders who have served as my mentors. They grounded me throughout this transition, inspiring me to lead authentically and to mentor and coach others to strive for excellence. They've been an invaluable sounding board, paving the way for me and the next generation of women to take up space and thrive in higher education.

Leadership Ethos:

As Mary Barra says: “Do every job you’re in like you’re going to do for the rest of your life and demonstrate that ownership of it.” This is a principle that has guided me, and it’s the legacy I hope to pass on.



Prof Nadine Petersen

Executive Dean: Faculty of Education

I invested in leadership of research and community engagement projects, early in my career because it enabled me to drive social justice and social impact through curriculum innovations. I did not want to take on a role in the hierarchy of the university structure. However, when I persuaded a female professor to take on a senior leadership role within UJ, telling her: “As a women professor, you owe it to the young women academics to take on this role”, I came to the realisation that these words were equally applicable to me. I needed to stand up as a women leader.

I think that women leaders in academia do not get the same support from all academics as their male counterparts. They are often undermined, have their motives and strategy questioned and made to feel incapable. Women must be tough and thick-skinned to flourish as academic leaders.

Leadership Ethos:

Lead boldly and by example, from a place of care for others, so that you make a difference in the world.



Prof Annah Moteetee

Executive Dean: Faculty of Science

My leadership journey in academia has been shaped by a commitment to transparency, consultation, integrity, and support. I have had the privilege of serving as Head of Department at two institutions of higher learning, Vice-Dean, and Senior Director of a Postgraduate School before assuming my current role as the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science. At every stage, I have believed that leadership is not about the position one holds, but the responsibility one carries — to create an environment where others can excel. I lead with openness, encouraging dialogue and valuing diverse perspectives, because I have seen that inclusive leadership breeds innovation and trust.

The underrepresentation of women in academia, particularly in science, is not merely a statistical concern — it is a profound loss of potential. When women's voices are absent from decision-making tables, research teams, and leadership roles, the academic community loses out on perspectives and solutions that could advance knowledge in transformative ways. As a female Executive Dean, I see it as my duty to create spaces where women, whether emerging scholars or seasoned professionals, can thrive without the burden of systemic barriers. Mentorship, advocacy, and policy reform are not side projects; they are central to my leadership agenda. Every young woman who enters a science classroom should believe that she can lead in science, and every woman in science should have the support to remain and succeed.

Leadership Ethos:

“Leadership is not about being the loudest voice in the room; it’s about making sure every voice is heard — and valued.”



Prof Kammila Naidoo

Executive Dean: Faculty of Humanities

I joined the Sociology Department at UJ in 2010 and, in 2013, became Head of Department. In 2017, I became Vice-Dean of Research. This was an exciting time, with policy change and many debates about the future of the Humanities and Social Sciences, new strategies, and 4IR. In 2020, precisely at the time that South Africa went into lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I became Executive Dean. Being one of the ‘COVID Deans’ was not easy. We had to guide teaching and learning and drive research productivity while the world was shutting down and anxiety levels were high. It was then that I learnt the true meaning of resilience — encouraging students and staff to believe in themselves and be passionate about their roles. In 2022, we were fully back on campus, grappling with changed realities once again.

I am grateful that our institution places a lot of emphasis on the promotion of women scholars and the recruitment of women into leadership positions. This is not the case in most parts of the world, where women face structural discrimination and underrepresentation in academia.

Over the years, I have striven to promote talented staff into leadership positions — as heads of departments, projects, and programmes.

Leadership Ethos:

To reflect my own leadership ethos, I will adapt Maya Angelou in stating: “To be a leader, you need to see in others potential that they might not see in themselves. We all have that possibility, that potential, and that promise of achieving something remarkable.”

Redefining leadership:

Prof Maria Frahm-Arp and the future of UJ's Library

Professor Maria Frahm-Arp is one of those rare academic figures who truly understand the inner workings of a university—from teaching and scholarship to institutional transformation. Now serving as Executive Director of the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Library and Information Centre, she's established herself as a key voice in shaping the university's future.

Despite a career filled with accolades and leadership roles, Prof Frahm-Arp remains grounded. Her identity, she says, is deeply rooted in spirituality and service. "First, I am someone who has a deep relationship with God. And a deep desire to enable other people to flourish and find their true centre in life."

This spiritual compass guides her leadership philosophy, which prioritises meaningful transformation.

With a PhD in Sociology from the University of Warwick, she began at UJ in 2014 as a lecturer in Religious Studies. Within three years, she advanced to Head of Department and then to Vice-Dean: Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Humanities.

Just as she was poised to become dean, she chose a different path.

"One of the things I realised was that if I became Dean of a faculty, I would be able to make changes within that faculty. But quite a lot of the things that I was frustrated about in the university, are largely around students' access to information. Moving the university forward with various types of digital technologies would not be something I would be able to do as a Dean."

The opportunity to lead the UJ Library came at the right time.

"I realised that if I took on the job in the library I would really be able to bring about some of the changes that I really felt as a lecturer we needed for all our students in the university, so I took the job," she explains. Stepping into the library leadership role posed its own challenges—notably, she was one of the only non-librarians to lead a university library in

South Africa. The resistance she faced only reinforced her leadership convictions.

"Real leadership comes when you have a very clear sense of vision and purpose...which you can effectively communicate so that you can create a culture in which people are able to be creative, be dynamic and play to their strengths...In which everybody feels that they have a voice. Their ideas are taken seriously."

At the core of her work is a deep sense of faith.

"I think every decision that I take is one really grounded and rooted in prayer...The big thing is in meditation and prayer, it's that constant rooting yourself, grounding yourself, seeing yourself as part of the bigger picture, not taking yourself too seriously. You know, realising that God holds all things."

Her tenure has brought real results.

"By the end of this year, I will have achieved everything, and a little bit more than I set out to achieve...We far exceeded what I had expected us to do, which was to bring about digital transformation...By the time I leave, each one of you will embrace the fourth industrial revolution and each one of you will have a future-fit job. None of you will lose your jobs," she says.

Looking back, she identifies one life-changing moment: receiving the British Commonwealth Scholarship.

What was the real fulfilment of a dream that I never in a million years thought would be possible, was getting a British Commonwealth Scholarship to study and do my PhD overseas... That's by far exceeded any expectation," she reflects.

Duality marks many aspects of Prof Frahm-Arp's life. She's also a reverend in the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Johannesburg—one of the few women to hold such a role. She's candid about the gender disparities that still exist in both academia and the church.

"It's wonderful that we are now able to ordain women. But in an unconscious way, as women, it's almost as though we've let ourselves enter a sub-optimal working conditions because we're just so grateful that we can work," she notes.

Her academic work, particularly on Pentecostalism in South Africa, has served as both scholarship and advocacy. She's the author of *Professional Women in South African Pentecostal Charismatic Churches and Into the Deep: Finding God in the Midst of Suffering*. Her more recent research delves into Pentecostalism's intersection with politics and economics.

Her advice for navigating such complex spaces?

"So, you speak out, you do the research. You walk the talk. You don't allow the beast to consume you."

Even with such a distinguished track record, Prof Frahm-Arp isn't done yet. She's already thinking about her next chapter—returning to academia.

"When my time is up in the library, I think I would like to go back into the academic environment... there's a lot that needs to be said and thought about. Particularly, within the church...The other thing that I would like to spend more time thinking about and writing about is: 'How faith can enable you as a leader and what does that look like?'"

In Prof Frahm-Arp's world, leadership is not about position—it's about purpose, service, and the power of faith to guide meaningful change.

"Real leadership comes when you have a very clear sense of vision and purpose... in which everybody feels they have a voice."



From UJ's Olympian: Caitlin Rooskrantz

Olympian. Graduate. Trailblazer. Caitlin Rooskrantz, one of South Africa's brightest gymnasts, opens up about balancing elite sport and academics, her passion for sports empowerment, and what comes next.

Q&A with Caitlin Rooskrantz

You've stood on podiums across the world. How did graduating from UJ feel by comparison?

Graduating was incredibly personal. It felt like a different kind of achievement—one where I was fully in control. I shared that moment with my parents and my coach of 15 years, Ilse Pelser. We've been through so much together, so it was emotional in the best way.

Why did you choose to study marketing?

Growing up in a minority sport taught me how underrepresented some athletes are. Marketing is a powerful tool. I want to use it to help young athletes build their personal brands and tell their stories in meaningful ways. I chose it with purpose.

What was your daily life like during university?

Intense! I'd train in the morning, attend lectures during the day, and then head back for another round of training in the evening. It was a full-time job on both sides. Planning and discipline got me through—and an understanding team at UJ helped a lot too.

How did you handle the pressure of competing internationally while studying?

I used every spare moment, even on flights or at hotels, to stay ahead. Sometimes I'd be submitting assignments from across the world. My lecturers were supportive, but ultimately it came down to staying accountable to myself.

After the 2024 Olympics, you paused training. What was behind that decision?

I needed to reset—mentally, physically, and academically. I wanted to finish my degree strong. Now that I've graduated, I'm easing back into training while exploring marketing more practically. I didn't want to do everything at once and burn out.

What's next?

I'm in a space of discovery right now—gaining work experience and figuring out where I want to specialise in marketing. Once I know, I'll pursue my Honours. Sport will always be part of me, but I'm excited to build something new too.

What advice would you give to student-athletes?

Time management, discipline, and consistency are everything. Create a structure, build momentum, and stay with it. It's not easy, but it's absolutely possible.

**“You don't
have to shrink
yourself to fit
into one box.”**



A new chapter in Digital Learning

An evolving digital ecosystem brings scale, innovation, and quality to modern education

On 21 May 2025, the University of Johannesburg marked a historic moment with the official launch of UJ Digital — a visionary initiative set to redefine the future of learning on the continent.

With an immersive showcase at the Sanlam Auditorium, the event featured exhibitions from faculties, a dazzling digital-themed stage production by UJ Arts & Culture, and musical performances, including a violinist wearing a flashing LED dress. Audience members, equipped with glowing wristbands, became part of a multi-sensory spectacle ushering in a new era of flexible, industry-relevant education.



“UJ Digital is not just an alternative. It breaks down barriers, accommodates diverse learners, and future-proofs our approach to education,”

said **Vice-Chancellor Prof Letlhokwa Mpedi**, who digitally unveiled the platform.



Why It Matters?

UJ Digital is designed to provide access to high-quality, career-aligned education for learners across demographics — from working adults and rural students to international audiences seeking African-led knowledge.

Backed by UJ’s Strategic Plan 2035, it offers programmes focused on accessibility, flexibility, and skills of the future — positioning UJ as a continental leader in digital transformation.

Voices of Endorsement



Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
UJ Chancellor,

recalled how the vision began: “We dreamed of a platform that could reach many more young people — and now it’s real. We’re reimagining education, creating a new world.”



Minister of Higher Education and Training, Mr Buti Manamela also sent a congratulatory message, recognising UJ’s leadership in hybrid learning and higher education reform.



STEM Leaders: Driving Discovery at UJ

Despite women making up just 30% of researchers worldwide [According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics], the University of Johannesburg continues to buck the trend — led by an exceptional cohort of women pushing boundaries in science, engineering, and innovation. This feature highlights remarkable scholars whose work is transforming not just their fields, but the very landscape of higher education.



Prof Heidi Abrahamse:
Illuminating the Future of Science

As one of UJ's most decorated researchers and an NRF A-rated scientist, Prof Heidi Abrahamse stands at the forefront of medical innovation through her work in photobiomodulation — a field that uses light to influence cellular function and healing.

Her pioneering leadership at the Laser Research Centre has elevated UJ's global profile, particularly in health sciences.

But beyond the accolades, Abrahamse remains committed to mentoring a new generation of scientists — many of them young women — and proving that South African research can lead on a global stage.

“It's not just about what we discover — it's about who gets to discover it,” she says.



Ms Nickey Janse van Rensburg:
Leading with Green Innovation

Recently recognised by the Technology Innovation Agency for her outstanding leadership in clean-tech, Prof Nickey Janse van Rensburg is the driving force behind UJ's Process, Energy and Environmental Technology Station (UJ PEETS).

Blending engineering with sustainability, her work brings researchers and entrepreneurs together to solve real-world challenges — from energy efficiency to green building design. She is a vocal advocate for women in engineering, often reminding her students that “your network is your net worth.”

Through her stewardship, PEETS has become a launchpad for applied innovation, industry collaboration, and inclusive progress.



Prof Philiswa Nomngongo:
A Nanotech Visionary

When Prof Philiswa Nomngongo received the prestigious James J. Morgan Early Career Award — becoming the only African and only woman among five global recipients — she didn't see it as a personal win alone.

Her work in environmental nanotechnology, particularly around low-cost water purification methods, is changing lives in under-resourced

communities. As Chair of the SARCHI research programme in nanotechnology, she leads a multidisciplinary team with a focus on both scientific excellence and societal impact.

Nomngongo's story is a powerful reminder that world-class research can emerge from the African continent — and that women are not just participating in science, but leading it.



Prof Thandiwe Sithole:
Turning Waste into Worth

For Prof Thandiwe Sithole, engineering is not just about solving technical problems — it's about solving human ones. With a PhD in Chemical Engineering, Prof Sithole focuses on waste valorisation, helping industries repurpose byproducts into usable resources.

Named one of the *Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans*, she is also an award-winning mentor and research supervisor. Her work blends chemistry, circular economy thinking, and a strong commitment to uplifting women in STEM. Sithole's lab isn't just producing data — it's producing impact.

“If research stays on the page, it hasn't done its job,” she says.



Prof Mahloro Hope Serepa-Dlamini:
Harnessing Genomics for Innovation

For Prof Mahloro Hope Serepa-Dlamini, science is a tool for both discovery and transformation. As Professor of Bacterial Genomics and Biotechnology and Head of the Department of Biotechnology and Food Technology at UJ, her research explores the colonisation and diversity of bacterial endophytes in indigenous South African medicinal plants — unlocking their genomic potential for pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and food innovation.

Her achievements have earned national acclaim: in 2024 she received the NRF Research Excellence Award for Emerging Researchers and the BioScience Scientist Award in Microbiological Sciences. In 2025



Prof Suné von Solms:
Engineering futures through Education

For Prof Suné von Solms, engineering is not just about systems — it's about people. An Associate Professor and Head of Department in UJ's Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, she is a registered professional engineer (ECSA), holds a PhD in Computer Engineering, and is a C2-rated NRF researcher.

Von Solms has pioneered innovative approaches to engineering education, from developing the Master of Systems Engineering programme to guiding countless postgraduate students. Recognised with the Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Award in Teaching Excellence, she is also a member of the UJ Academy of Distinguished Teachers and SASSEE.

“As an engineering educator, I want students to experience the world they will one day help shape. Unlocking their potential creates learning environments that can truly transform society,” she says.

she was named the winner of the South African Women in Science Award in the Distinguished Young Woman Researcher (Natural Sciences and Engineering) category, alongside her selection as a finalist for the HERS-SA Higher Education Women Leaders Awards.

“Science should not only answer questions — it should create opportunities for people to grow and transform society.”

Prof Stella Bvuma, an advocate for digital inclusivity

“Technology must multiply opportunities for the haves and have-nots.”



Professor Stella Bvuma, Director of the School of Consumer Intelligence and Information Systems (SciIS) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), is a champion in Information Technology Management. Her work focuses on digital transformation, organisational change, and enabling inclusive digital adoption in both government and industry. From a rural village in Limpopo to a leadership role at the University, Prof Bvuma has become a passionate advocate for bridging the digital divide, ensuring that technology serves as an equaliser in society, not a divider.

Professor Bvuma, grew up in both the township and rural area, with limited access to information, found inspiration in a book she was gifted, titled “Information Technology,” igniting her passion for ICT.

That encounter led her to UJ, where her passion for using technology to address real-world challenges grew stronger. She completed her studies, joined the University’s staff, and steadily progressed into leadership roles. Her journey emphasises the transformative power of knowledge and inspires others to harness technology for change, demonstrating that anyone can succeed regardless of background.

As she moved into senior academic roles, Prof Bvuma often found herself navigating spaces where few women, and even fewer rural-born professionals, were represented. She recalls with a smile, “I was a student in the same department where I studied IT, this meant transcending to leadership roles such as Head of Department. The lecturers who once taught me had to call me boss.” She took on the role whilst she was busy with her PhD studies, a privilege she is forever grateful for.

But behind the humour was a determined effort to overcome self-doubt and prove her place. “Traditionally, you’re not expected to lead academics, let alone those titled professor when you’re just a girl with no PhD,” she says. While serving on a senior leadership team, without an academic title, she engaged a room of Doctors and Professors and told her colleagues to call her “The Queen”, a nickname from her village upbringing that became a source of pride and a symbol of her identity. In time, she earned her PhD and the title ‘Dr’ and now Professor, but is still affectionately known as “Her Majesty, The Queen” by her colleagues.

“In my village, the title ‘Queen’ is reserved for women who lead with integrity, love and kindness, regardless of their educational background.”

Prof Bvuma’s research and PhD thesis, “An ICT Adoption Framework for Township SMMEs”, reflects her mission to position small businesses as engines of inclusive growth, to address digital inequalities. “SMMEs are the backbone of a thriving economy,” she insists. Her framework identifies critical barriers such as lack of infrastructure, costly data, and inadequate training, which she tackles through policy reformation. She has held roles at entities like SEDA and SITA and has consistently advocated for SMMEs to participate in the digital economy.

For Prof Bvuma, her work in technology is not just a theoretical academic pursuit. Visiting her rural village, Ga-Sekgopo, she translates technology’s promise into tangible impact. She recalls elders’ awe during WhatsApp video calls: “You can surely see me, because I see you”. Yet this digital inclusion carries risks. Senior citizens, targeted by scammers, lost \$3.4 billion globally in 2023 alone. Hence, she advocates for cybersecurity education as social justice for all, not just the entrepreneurs in SMMEs. She merges pragmatism with profound empathy, translating concepts into Sepedi as she teaches seniors to spot phishing scams, create strong passwords, and protect pensions. “Failure to embrace technology excludes them from a digital world,” she warns, framing cyber-literacy as essential for dignity and financial independence.

Her approach mirrors UJ’s mandate to position cybersecurity as a human right. “We prioritise making UJ an inclusive cybersecurity hub,” she asserted. “Negligence here has severe, far-reaching consequences.”

Prof Bvuma’s influence extends beyond academia into the world of business, where she mentors IT practitioners and up-and-coming CIOs. While she offers insight and guidance covering agile methodologies, cybersecurity and integration, she remains humble: “Mentorship is a two-way street,” she explains. “CIOs may view me as the IT expert, but I learn as much from them.” Always human in her approach, she also provides emotional support for these young leaders, particularly the women, who are finding their feet in this demanding field.

“Let us not be afraid to educate ourselves. IT is an ever-changing environment.”

Her advice to CIOs is always the same: introduce time-saving tools to bring back fun and creativity, and to engage the youth in innovative ways, such as in hackathons. Always putting her money where her mouth is, she facilitates a regular hackathon at UJ’s Technopreneurship Centre. This engagement fuels her belief that “impactful collaboration” across government and the public sector, regulators, and civil society is essential to build an enabling digital ecosystem.

When asked about her legacy, Prof Bvuma’s vision transcends the goals of SciIS: “Beyond the bricks and mortar of the University, I strive for my life and accomplishments to reflect that I embraced a divine calling to make a tangible impact”. Her leadership is informed by the wisdom she gained from her rural settings, and global digital expertise, proves STEM’s ultimate purpose is human upliftment. As Africa’s digital transformation accelerates, Prof Stella Bvuma ensures nobody young or old, entrepreneur or employee, or just a “simple girl from a village” will be left behind.

Today, Prof Bvuma continues to lead with vision and purpose. She is actively involved in national efforts to strengthen digital literacy, support emerging technologies, and promote equitable access to digital resources in marginalised communities. Her commitment to transformation extends beyond academia, she is a trusted advisor on government ICT strategies and is instrumental in shaping policies that prioritise people-centred innovation. Her leadership at UJ exemplifies how education, when driven by empathy and vision, can be a powerful force for social change.

“We broaden horizons because SMMEs—and seniors—are the backbone of a thriving economy.”

Technology that supports, not distracts:

Professor Thea de Wet on Education and Innovation

Professor Thea de Wet has spent over two decades at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) shaping how students learn and how academics teach. She currently leads Special Projects in Academic Development and Support (ADS) and is a Professor of Anthropology and Development Studies. Previously, she held the role of Senior Director of the Centre for Academic Technologies (CAT), where she led pioneering initiatives in digital learning and educational innovation.

A PhD graduate in Anthropology from the University of Florida, USA, Professor de Wet combines her anthropological expertise with a passion for educational technology. Her work spans curriculum development, postgraduate supervision, and the creation of tools and platforms that enhance the student learning experience. Her contributions to teaching excellence were recognised with the Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Award in 2013.

Curiosity meets innovation

"My life as an academic has been guided by curiosity," she says. A lifelong fascination with science fiction and speculative writing, paired with her anthropological training, fostered an openness to exploring new technologies and their potential in education.

When UJ adopted a learning management system in 2004, she began experimenting with digital tools to support students and make learning more engaging. In her first-year Anthropology modules, particularly biological anthropology, she introduced games for vocabulary, collaborative wikis, and immersive online resources to make complex topics more accessible.

"These small experiments reinforced an idea I still subscribe to: technology must be integrated into teaching and learning, not added as a gimmick," she notes.

Building solutions from within

Her leadership at CAT and in Academic Development and Support expanded her vision. Imported systems were costly and often unsustainable. "Particularly after COVID-19, it became clear that UJ needed to design its own

solutions," she explains. Collaborating with colleagues and student interns, she helped develop UJ-grown platforms for module and teaching evaluation, postgraduate monitoring, secure residence voting, meals distribution governance, and early academic analytics. These projects proved that UJ could innovate internally while building sustainable expertise.

A people-centred approach to leadership

Professor de Wet's approach to leadership emphasises empowerment, experimentation, and careful evaluation. "Innovation requires being cautious but not shy of trying new ways of doing things. Pilots are essential—you start small, test carefully, and scale only when uptake is clear," she says.

She places people at the heart of her leadership:
"Good leadership means spotting ideas and people, giving them space to grow, and ensuring that education is always foregrounded—not the technology."

By creating space for colleagues, especially younger academics, to flourish, she demonstrates that even projects that don't succeed offer valuable lessons.

INNOVATION

Ubuntu, Big Data, and the Heart of Africa

Professor Talita Greyling's redefinition of well-being economics

In a world increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence, fast-paced markets, and rising inequality, one woman at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) is harnessing the power of STEM to ask a deceptively simple yet revolutionary question: *Are we happy?* Professor Talita Greyling, a scholar in well-being economics from UJ's School of Economics, is not only reshaping how we understand happiness but is positioning Africa, and women in STEM, at the very centre of that conversation.

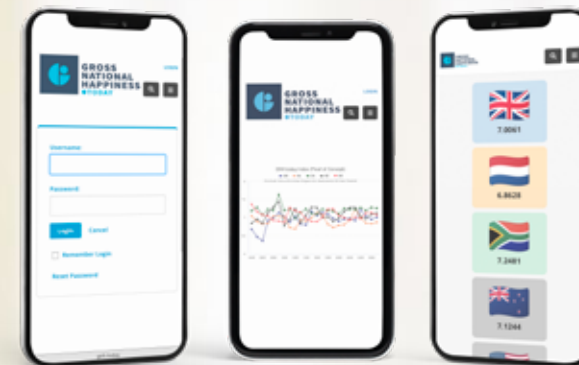
Originally captivated by the elegance of data analysis, mathematics, and statistics, Prof Greyling's trajectory took a humanistic turn during her early career. "I saw firsthand the heartbreaking conditions these children endured, especially the infants," she recalls of her encounters with HIV-affected children in impoverished communities. "This experience stirred something within me, compelling me to use my skills as an economist to make a meaningful difference in people's lives." This pivot marked her entry into well-being economics, a field that emerged in the 1970s and goes far beyond GDP to measure what truly matters in life—health, education, social relationships, and purpose.

"How can we know if we are improving people's lives if we do not measure?"

Prof Greyling's work is not just theoretical. Her *Gross National Happiness.today (GNH.today)* project is a bold leap into the future of social science.



Using machine learning and Big Data analytics, it monitors emotional well-being in real-time across multiple countries. Her team mines social media platforms to extract emotional expressions from millions of posts daily, quantifying happiness, anger, fear, and more.



It's the type of work that positions Africa not at the margins but at the forefront of global academic innovation.

The 2025, World Happiness Report (WHR), for the first time ever, was launched from Africa, hosted by the University of Johannesburg. Prof Greyling played a pivotal role in what many now view as a turning point for global well-being discourse. "*Well-being is not only about money, but it is about health, social relationships, education, and much more,*" she said at the launch. And indeed, the event resonated with Africa's deep-rooted value system, particularly the spirit of *Ubuntu—I am because we are*.

"Africa is a very happy continent because of the culture of Ubuntu."

The continent, often misrepresented through the lens of economic hardship, is teaching the world that generosity, community resilience, and spiritual groundedness are equally, if not more, important indicators of a fulfilling life. Prof Greyling stresses that, "Women bring a unique emotional connection to well-being research, which is invaluable in understanding and improving people's lives."

The past years has been one of milestones for Prof Greyling. She became the first African appointed to the prestigious World Wellbeing Panel and was awarded the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies Research Fellow Award, becoming only the second African to receive this honour. She also secured a UKinSPIRE seeding grant for a cross-cultural project on community well-being. Her growing international recognition speaks not only to her academic rigour but also to her ability to communicate the urgency of measuring and improving well-being across different cultural and economic contexts. As Vice-President (Membership) of the International Society of Quality-of-Life Studies and co-editor of the *Journal of Happiness Studies and Applied Research in Quality of Life*, she is ensuring that African voices, and African women in particular, are not only included but are leading global conversations.

The call for women in STEM

In advocating for women in STEM, Prof Greyling is passionate: "I encourage any young woman to pursue STEM, knowing their contributions are essential to creating a better, more equitable world." She believes that the emotional intelligence women bring to data and policy analysis adds depth to research that often leans too heavily on cold, hard numbers.

"Women's voices in STEM are not optional—they are essential."

Despite significant challenges, especially a lack of comprehensive well-being data in Africa, Prof Greyling remains optimistic. She sees Big Data and AI not as cold tools of modernity, but as bridges to understanding human emotion, especially in underrepresented communities. But she also cautions against over-reliance on tech alone. "For Africa's perspectives on well-being to be fully recognised, we need more investment in research, local capacity, and policies that reflect our values," she says. This includes training the next generation of African researchers, many of whom are women, to shape these narratives from the inside.

Breaking New Ground: Prof Hassina Mouri's Global Leadership in Geoscience

When Professor Hassina Mouri was elected as President of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) in 2024, she not only made history as the first African woman to hold the position — she redefined what global scientific leadership can look like.



The IUGS, founded in 1961, is one of the world's largest scientific organisations, representing over a million geoscientists across more than 120 countries. It plays a critical role in advancing collaboration on geological challenges of international importance, from sustainable resource use to planetary change. Prof Mouri's election brought Africa's voice to the forefront of these conversations, a moment of continental and institutional pride.

"I am truly honoured and grateful for the trust placed in me," she reflected at the time of her election. "It is a privilege to lead such a distinguished union, and I see it as an opportunity to amplify African expertise in shaping the future of geoscience."

A trailblazer in Medical Geology

By training, Prof Mouri is a metamorphic geologist, but her pioneering work lies in the development of Medical Geology — a discipline she introduced to Africa in 2013. Her research focuses on the interaction between geological materials and human health, a field with profound implications for the continent. Over the past decade, she has presented her work on international stages and published widely, positioning herself as one of the leading voices in this emerging field.

Her leadership trajectory has been equally remarkable. In 2020, she became the first African woman appointed Vice President of the IUGS. She has served as chairperson of the South African National Committee for the IUGS, a member of the advisory board of the South African Journal of Science, and continues to contribute to national and global scientific bodies, including the NRF rating researchers panel in Earth Sciences and the International Science Council South Africa National Governing Body.

From Johannesburg to the world stage

Prof Mouri's journey reflects the global character of both science and leadership. Having studied and worked across Africa, Europe, and America, she brings a wealth of perspectives to her role, while remaining deeply committed to advancing African scholarship.

Her election was celebrated within UJ as a powerful affirmation of the university's vision to be an international university of choice, anchored in Africa and dynamically shaping the future.

"Prof Mouri's presidency marks a new chapter in global leadership, and UJ is proud to be the home of such pioneering talent," said Prof Annah Moteetee, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science. "Her achievement speaks to our values of empowerment, transformation, and academic excellence. She is an inspiration to the next generation of leaders."

Inspiring future leaders

For women in science, Prof Mouri's achievement carries particular significance. At a time when women still make up less than a third of researchers globally, her presidency represents both progress and possibility. It reminds us that representation at the highest levels of leadership matters — not only for recognition, but for shaping the agendas of global science.

As she continues her term at the helm of IUGS, Prof Mouri's work exemplifies the transformative power of leadership rooted in excellence, courage, and vision. Her journey is more than a personal triumph; it is a landmark in the story of African science and an inspiration for generations to come.

Breaking Barriers in Data Science

When Dr Khensani Xivuri walked across the graduation stage in early 2024, she wasn't just receiving a degree. She was making history. As the first Black woman to earn a PhD in Applied Data Science at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), Dr Xivuri shattered barriers and opened doors for future generations of women in STEM.

Her journey from the village of Peninghotsa in Malamulele, Limpopo, to the frontiers of Artificial Intelligence research is one defined by grit, perseverance, and vision. She recalls her father's words in Xitsonga — "unga sunguli xilo unga xi hetisi" ("do not start what you cannot finish") — as a guiding principle. It carried her through sleepless nights, tough feedback, and the daunting task of balancing work with study.

"It feels absolutely incredible," she reflects. "I've always thrived on challenges. Every difficulty was an opportunity to push past my limits. I want women to see STEM as a thrilling adventure — one where we can leave our mark and inspire the next generation."



Tackling bias in AI

Dr Xivuri's research addresses one of the most urgent issues in Artificial Intelligence: bias. She developed a procedural model to detect and mitigate bias in AI systems before they are deployed, recognising the profound consequences that flawed algorithms can have on people's lives.

She illustrates the stakes with a simple example: a woman unfairly denied a home loan because of skewed data or a flawed credit model. **"Bias in AI has real social costs," she explains. "If we don't involve the communities these systems serve in their design, we risk reinforcing inequalities instead of solving them."**

Her work also highlighted the lack of gender and social diversity in AI development teams — a gap that can lead to underrepresentation and misrepresentation in models with far-reaching impact.

A symbol of possibility

Dr Xivuri's achievement is more than personal. It represents a milestone for transformation and inclusivity in science and technology. As Dr Stella Bvuma, Director of the School of Consumer Intelligence and Information Systems at UJ, observes

"Her accomplishment surpasses mere academic triumph; it embodies the essence of shattering barriers and paving the way for generations to come. In an era increasingly reliant on data and technology, Khensani is a guiding light — an example of what it means to navigate the digital world with excellence and confidence."

Anchored at UJ

For Dr Xivuri, UJ provided the environment to thrive. She credits the Centre for Applied Data Science (CADS) for its innovative support model, from quarterly PhD excursions to intensive mentorship. "The CADS team believed in us and constantly pushed us to reach our potential. That support made all the difference."

She also pays tribute to her supervisor, Prof Hossana Twinomurinzi, and her peers for their unwavering encouragement. "The education system needs more people like them," she says with a smile.

A beacon for the future

Today, Dr Xivuri stands as a powerful example of resilience, intellectual courage, and leadership. Her achievement underscores both the challenges women face in STEM and the transformative impact of breaking through them.

As she continues her research journey, her message remains clear: women belong at the centre of science and technology. "The greater our presence in STEM, the more empowering it becomes for future generations of women," she affirms.

Dr Khensani Xivuri's story is not only a celebration of academic excellence but also a reminder that the future of AI — and of science itself — is richer, fairer, and more innovative when built by diverse hands and voices.

"I want women to see STEM as a thrilling adventure — one where we can leave our mark and inspire the next generation."

CALTSTEAM Launches at UJ

A new centre is bridging science, tech, engineering, and art through future-focused learning

The University of Johannesburg has officially opened its pioneering Centre for Advanced Learning Technologies in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (CALTSTEAM).

By merging Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR), and machine learning with the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics, CALTSTEAM is transforming how teachers teach and learners learn — from lecture halls to township classrooms.

“This Centre is about innovation and societal impact,” said Prof Nadine Petersen, Dean of the Faculty of Education. “We’re changing how future educators engage with technology — not just in theory, but in practice.”

“The centre is a response to real challenges in math and science education,”

said Prof Umesh Ramnarian, CALTSTEAM Director. “Our aim is to build a strong pipeline of future scholars, scientists, and innovators.”

In his keynote address, Vice-Chancellor Prof Letlhokwa Mpedi described CALTSTEAM as a flagship of UJ’s 2035 vision:

“We are not just adapting to the future — we are creating it.”

How CALTSTEAM is Shaping the Future:

- **Virtual Reality Teacher Training:** UJ’s BED students now conduct micro-lessons in VR classrooms, gaining real-world experience in digital teaching environments.
- **Upskilling Today’s Teachers:** A specialised Short Learning Programme (SLP) trains current Life and Physical Sciences teachers to integrate immersive tech into everyday lessons.
- **The XR Online Coding Club:** This outreach programme teaches high school learners how to code using VR and AR — broadening access to digital skills in underserved schools.
- **Culturally-Aware Tech:** CALTSTEAM is developing CAVARS (Culturally Anchored VR/AR Simulations), which blend local knowledge systems with key curriculum content to make science more relatable and inclusive.



Driving student impact:

The leadership journey of Maipato Mmako-Dlamini

“Education isn’t just about academics. It’s about people, journeys, and being bold enough to build something new.”

Maipato Mmako-Dlamini’s academic journey at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) is a masterclass in initiative, transformation, and turning purpose into possibility. What began as a BA in Humanities would evolve into a career shaped by leadership, mentorship, and a profound belief in student empowerment—most visibly embodied in her groundbreaking role with the Africa By Bus programme. Raised in the east of Johannesburg, Maipato entered UJ ready to work hard and carve her own path. With a knack for self-directed learning, she balanced her lectures with her first student job—as an HP Campus Ambassador. The opportunity unlocked her creative spark and landed her in the African Nerds campaign, which ambitiously aimed to download an eBook from the top of Mount Kilimanjaro to promote digital literacy. That bold spirit would follow her throughout her journey.

“The first time I mentored, I realised it was my purpose.”

Mentoring quickly became more than a side role. “It gave me clarity,” she reflects. “It felt deeply human—helping someone navigate life, not just studies.” Many of the students she mentored were in the audience when she graduated in 2017, a moment that affirmed her calling.

That same year, a happy accident—walking into the wrong office—landed her an interview for a tutoring role. She seized the moment,



got the job, and continued to build credibility and experience across UJ's academic and student support ecosystem. She also joined UJ's International Office as a student assistant, helping international students settle in, run excursions, and representing the University with professionalism and warmth.

Despite juggling roles in mentoring, tutoring, and administration while studying toward her Honours, she never wavered. "I was always running, never walking on campus," she jokes. "But the gym kept me sane."

Africa By Bus: Steering UJ's flagship student programme

What truly propelled Maipato's impact beyond the ordinary was her impactful involvement in Africa By Bus, UJ's flagship cultural immersion programme, as a coordinator and chaperone. Originally focused on travel and heritage exposure, the programme underwent a transformation under her guidance.

"I wanted to deepen the academic experience," she says. "So, I added structured research into the trips I conceptualised." Under her leadership, her students began conducting fieldwork aligned with the MAPS (Mastering Academic and Professional Skills) module. They gathered data during trips, produced research reports, and received academic credit.

"When I got involved, I brought in an academic layer. It wasn't just about crossing borders—it became about crossing into knowledge."

On her first Africa By Bus trip to Mozambique, she managed over 250 students, overseeing logistics, safety, and academic output. Her innovative approach resulted in the birth of Africa By Air-Bus in 2019, which flew students to Tanzania to explore digital storytelling and cultural narratives. Maipato recently came back from a trip to Zambia during July recess under the theme Pan-Africanism and regional integration.

In 2024, Maipato's work was nationally recognised when she was named among

the Mail & Guardian's Top 200 Young South Africans in the Travel and Hospitality category. The honour affirmed her ability to fuse travel, education, leadership, and transformation into a singular, impactful programme that makes learning real and relevant.

Academic brilliance and relentless service

Despite her demanding schedule, Maipato remained committed to her own academic excellence. After years of mentoring others, she finally prioritised her own journey, completing her Master's degree in 2024 with distinction. "This time it was for me," she says. "It was emotional—proof that I could do it without needing to prove anything to anyone else."

She continues to lecture in MAPS, a role that comes full circle from her days as a mentor in the same programme. She has been helping to shape first-year extended degree students' foundational academic and professional skills with empathy and rigour for the last 9 years.

Her PhD in sociolinguistics, which she began in 2025, focuses on culture, multilingualism, and identity with a special focus on Tsotsi Taal. She's already presented her research internationally, including in Romania via ErasmusPlus.

Still, what drives her most is student support. She works closely with UJ's student services to flag at-risk students through mentor reports, track attendance, and deliver early interventions. "No student should disappear without someone noticing," she says.

"I didn't just find my voice at UJ—I helped others find theirs too."

For Maipato Mmako-Dlamini, UJ has been a launchpad—but it's also been a home she helped build. Through Africa By Bus, her teaching, mentoring, and research, she continues to widen the path for others to walk—and thrive.

Her advice to students is simple: "Put yourself out there. There are a lot of opportunities for growth, both personally and professionally. Our students just need to put their ears on the ground and capitalise on the chances they get."

AFRICA BY BUS HIGHLIGHTS

Launched:
2017

Countries visited:
Namibia, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Participants per trip: 150–250 students

Themes explored: Heritage, identity, digital storytelling, language, sustainability

Outcomes: Research papers, multimedia submissions, international recognition

Spin-off initiative: Africa By Air-Bus, launched 2019, China By Train launched in 2025



Prime time: UJ alumna Mantsoe Tsatsi's rise to radio

Radio DJ, MC, producer and UJ alumna Mantsoe Tsatsi—better known as Mantsoe Pout—has built an influential name in South Africa's entertainment industry. From UJFM to YFM, Metro FM and now 947, her voice continues to shape the sound of local airwaves.

Currently, her soothing voice eases people into their weekends on the show 947 Weekends with Mantsoe from 7am to 10am.

But her journey didn't start in entertainment as she pursued a Psychology degree at the University of Johannesburg.

You pursued a BA in Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. What initially drew you to study Psychology?

When I was in high school, I was pretty sure I was going to do something in the Maths and Science field because that was always my interest and I did really well in those subjects. I don't know what happened because when I got to UJ I applied for Psychology. I always say it's because I was influenced by my uncle's wife who is a therapist and I admired her and wanted to be like her. When I got to UJ, something just led me to choose Psychology.

Were there any modules or lecturers that left a lasting impression?

I was pleasantly surprised at just how much I enjoyed Psychology and I always say one day I should actually practice. Studying human behaviour is something I really fell in love with. My ancillary was sociology, which I really loved. It was such a different space from being a numbers kid to becoming a lover of writing that I had never immersed myself in previously. I enjoyed modules like sociology and statistics, obviously. When everyone was crying about it I was happy to show off that numbers were still my thing. How has your Psychology background influenced your work in radio?



The beauty of having studied Psychology is how relatable you feel it makes you. It is easy to put yourself in people's shoes and pardon people when you may be frustrated with them. In the space I work in, everyone's opinions have to be considered. You have to see where everyone is coming from. I do believe without the background of studying human behaviour, I don't know if I would be equipped to deal with different people.

You have to be sensitive to all sorts of people. Sometimes you are caught off guard. It is like your superpower is knowing how to deal with people. It's in conversation and knowing how to talk to each person as an individual. On my show, a very family dense show, means I could be speaking to a 50-year-old Milton and then to 9-year-old Zayne. Being able to move across demographics is highly sensitised by what I studied. Being able to give every space the attention and adjustment it requires when needed is a skill.

What was student life like for you at UJ?

Student life was interesting. I always say I wish I could go back to varsity and have the full experience. I enjoyed it but I was a working child - I went straight into radio (UJFM) and theatre (Arts and Culture) and other work outside of the University. One thing I think I missed out on was just being able to have that student experience because I was split between being involved in all the arts I was involved in and school. I didn't stop to enjoy the other things that made me a student like sitting on the lawns and chilling with friends. I told all my siblings to try and do everything they could when they got to varsity.

It really equips you for real life, it is a proper training ground for how your life is going to be. I am grateful for that. University really moulded me into who I wanted to become. I was a busy student because I had found what I knew would be the rest of my life.

I was pleasantly surprised at just how much I enjoyed Psychology and I always say one day I should actually practice. Studying human behaviour is something I really fell in love with.

Was there a turning point when you knew radio was your calling?

When I joined UJFM, I was a newsreader. I auditioned to be a presenter and they said news was better suited. But I knew myself and what I wanted. It was during my first year on UJFM radio that I thought to myself - I don't know if I am going to do my postgrad for Psychology...radio was set in stone. I immersed myself in spaces - I shadowed Dineo Ranaka for a couple of weeks at YFM on weekends.

That was in second or third year and I decided then that I would continue to work in radio and I would work at YFM. When YFM called me during my third year to work for them, I just knew my path was laid out for me. I made radio my priority to make sure I could really move with it as a career.

So your transition from a university student to a professional in the demanding world of radio was almost seamless?

Absolutely. In fact, by the time I was going to YFM, I started during my final year of my degree. I never had that sitting at home period having to wonder what is next. Radio can be incredibly rewarding but also demanding.

How do you maintain your mental health in the spotlight?

What has been a telling thing for me lately is how my friends like to say I 'therapise' everything, I make sense of everything. I think it gets tough to separate yourself once you know the truth, your goggles stay off when you study psychology. I am always investigating and analysing. I do go to therapy, I think that's why I am now interested in going back to school to do that postgrad to see how I can research people more. I apply what I studied quite a lot. I don't find myself frustrated by work or people around me as easily as I think I would have been if I didn't study what I did.



That is the beauty in a Humanities degree, it really teaches you human behaviour. I think if everyone could have the opportunity to study at least one module from the Psychology degree - running concurrently with what they are studying - we would be in a better world.

Looking back, what's your biggest personal lesson?

Everyone needs everyone. It doesn't matter how big or small you think the next person is. We are living in the age of influence - you need to know what influences you and who influences you. You can't do this life thing alone. People need people.

What's your advice to UJ students?

Believe it or not - these are the best years of your life. You are going to meet people that will change your life, people that will heavily influence your life. Varsity is a big world, at 18 you can't fathom just how big it is. Some of us leave our families to live in a residence or move into an apartment. It is such a big step to take on your own. You have to give yourself grace. You are putting yourself out there for the world to accept you or not. This is where you make lifelong friends. You could become the best of your lineage or become destructive. It is a privilege, even though it shouldn't be, because not everyone will get the opportunity. It can change your life and in turn change the lives of others through you. So take it seriously but also enjoy it.

Beyond radio, what other projects excite you right now?

We are actually about to shoot Season 2 of my Podcast - Moments with Mantsoe. We are in pre-production and I am so excited. I took a long break after Season 1 to go back to the drawing board. I also launched my Supper Club. I love cooking so much. I have always done it for friends and family and they always

encouraged me to cook for more people. So the Supper Club - Eat Your Art Out - is a pop up restaurant with a tailor made three course menu hosted inside a gallery because I love art and food. I am working on the second instalment of this social dining experiment.

I also produce for television and there are some projects I am hoping will be coming to life very soon.

I was also the creative content director for the international format show The Masked Singer on SABC 3. I have been enjoying finding other things that make me happy but at the core of it radio drives everything.

That's why I say university can really change your life. I did one thing at UJ right and it led me to the rest of my life.

What legacy do you hope to leave behind—as a broadcaster and as a UJ alumna?

Definitely that I finish what I start. I lived everyday to finish my purpose. I want to leave this place knowing I did all I could. I want to be known as someone who lived a full life. I still dream, I am still a child to someone so I have wild dreams - I still remember the dreams I had when I was 8 years old. I am living some of those dreams out loud. I want to be able to tick them all off knowing they are part of my journey. I love to be happy. I want to chase as many happy days as possible. I want to be remembered as someone who lived exactly how they wanted and lived out their purpose.

That's why I say university can really change your life. I did one thing at UJ right and it led me to the rest of my life.

Honouring the Trailblazers

Celebrating the four remarkable women awarded honorary doctorates by the University of Johannesburg in 2025.

As part of its 20-year milestone, UJ proudly confers honorary doctorates on four extraordinary women whose life's work exemplifies courage, creativity, and transformative impact. From literature and diplomacy to publishing and humanitarian service, these honourees embody the spirit of leadership and societal change.



01. **Antjie Krog** Poet. Journalist. Cultural Voice.

Internationally acclaimed for her fearless literary voice and groundbreaking journalism, Antjie Krog's work has chronicled South Africa's most complex truths. Her reporting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and her multilingual poetry continue to influence debates around identity, justice, and healing. A cultural icon who has bridged Afrikaans and global discourse, she redefines the role of the writer as witness and catalyst.

02. **Sister Abegail Ntleko** Nurse. Humanitarian. Compassion in Action.

Sister Ntleko has dedicated her life to the care of orphaned and vulnerable children, particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS. With quiet resilience and global recognition—including the Dalai Lama's Unsung Hero Award—she has provided not just health care but hope. Her life reminds us that transformation begins with service.



03. **Barbara Masekela** Poet. Diplomat. Cultural Architect.

A leading intellectual and former South African Ambassador to the U.S. and France, Barbara Masekela has shaped national dialogue through literature, education, and diplomacy. Her commitment to cultural development and public service stands as a testament to the power of words—and of women leading change on the world stage.

04. **Margaret Busby** Publisher. Trailblazer. Pan-African Thinker.

As the UK's first Black woman publisher, Ghana-born Margaret Busby has rewritten the rules of the literary world. Co-founding Allison & Busby, she opened doors for African and diaspora voices and fought for inclusion in global publishing. Her visionary legacy continues to inspire writers, editors, and thinkers across continents.



“Each of these distinguished individuals embodies the University of Johannesburg's values of excellence, leadership, and service to humanity.”

— Professor Letlhokwa Mpedi,
UJ Vice-Chancellor and Principal



Rethinking the Modern University

The future of education isn't just about what we teach but more fundamentally about how we engage, empower, and enable every learner. At the University of Johannesburg (UJ), under the leadership of Registrar Professor Bettine van Vuuren, this future is being built today, brick by digital brick, with a relentless focus on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and social impact.

Crucially, this journey begins not in the lecture hall, but the moment a student steps onto their academic path. In 2024, UJ didn't just talk about 4IR leadership but redefined it, setting a bold new benchmark for South African higher education and creating an inclusive, tech-driven ecosystem where women in STEM and every student can thrive.

While many South African universities still grapple with the logistical labyrinth of registration, relying on easily forged ID copies, manual verification, and queues that test patience, UJ decisively broke ground. The University became the first in South Africa to implement facial recognition technology for student registration. This wasn't merely a tech upgrade but a strategic declaration of intent.

"For us, embracing 4IR isn't confined to our curricula. It is integrated into the entire student lifecycle, from that first interaction during application and registration right through to graduation where we issue each graduate with a block-chain enabled digital certificate and secure badge to share on

LinkedIn," says Prof van Vuuren. "This revolutionary step with facial recognition is far more than just preventing fraud, and it is a testament to our commitment to providing a secure, efficient, and profoundly progressive learning environment. It reflects our dedication to staying at the forefront of technological advancement."

Gone are the days of vulnerable ID submissions. New UJ students received a simple SMS prompting them to confirm their identity via a quick, non-intrusive facial scan. This technology analyses unique facial features, creating a virtually impenetrable barrier against identity fraud. "This advanced level of authentication ensures the person registering is indeed who they claim to be," explains Dr Tinus van Zyl, UJ's Senior Director of Central Academic Administration. The result is an enhanced security level for the entire University community and a registration process stripped of unnecessary friction, setting a powerful tone for a student's 4IR journey from day one.

UJ's 4IR registration revolution

Steps:

- SMS trigger:**
New students receive the link.
- 5-seconds to scan:**
AI matches facial biometrics.
- Instant verification:**
Identity confirmed.
- Facial Scan:**
5-second verification.

Impact

70% faster than manual ID checks.

Zero identity fraud cases in the 2024 pilot.

Fully virtual and accessible nationwide.

MoUJi, the 24/7 Smart Digital Assistant that is supporting applicants and students

Meet MoUJi

Chat now

www.uj.ac.za



The Future Reimagined

UJ's 4IR commitment extends far beyond secure access to the University. Recognising the immense stress of transitioning to university, amplified by the staggering ratio of nearly 695,000 first-time applications for less than 11,000 spaces, UJ proactively sought a smarter solution. The answer arrived in the form of MoUJi, our AI-powered digital assistant.

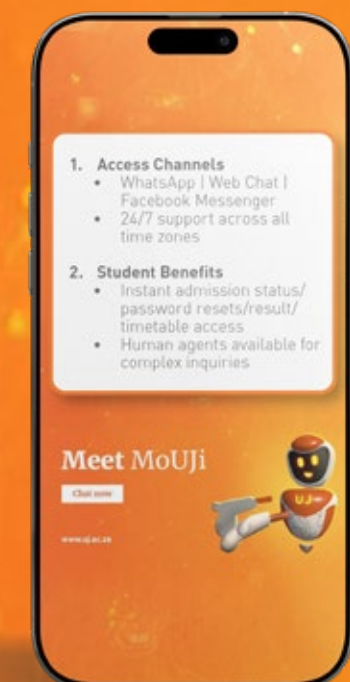
Born from a need to handle all the application inquiries efficiently and reduce the peak-period cost of temporary staffing during registrations, MoUJi embodies UJ's "walk the talk" approach to 4IR. Launched in 2020 and continuously evolving, MoUJi leverages AI and natural language processing to simulate human conversation, providing instant, 24/7 answers on everything from applications and registrations to financial statements, timetables, and student portal password resets.

and locations, ensuring that access to critical information isn't dictated by proximity to a campus or ownership of a high-end device." The results speak volumes and has shown a reduction from 120 to 60 temporary call centre agents during registrations over the last few year, saving over half a million rand annually, increasing student engagement and ensuring complex queries get to the human supported agents.

"MoUJi was conceived to alleviate pressure on our invaluable Central Academic Administration (CAA) team, to ensure students get basic information without delays, and crucially, present a low barrier to entry," explains Prof van Vuuren. Its success has been remarkable.

Accessible via the UJ website, Facebook Messenger, and crucially, WhatsApp, MoUJi meets students where they are, providing personalised support where and when they need it. This multi-channel approach, built on the latest technology, is key to UJ's demographic agility.

"By deploying on WhatsApp, we've broadened our reach significantly," stresses Prof van Vuuren. "It allows us to engage students across diverse socio-economic backgrounds





20 Years of UJ: A transformation model wrapped in resilience and triumph

Twenty years ago, South Africa's higher education landscape was irrevocably reshaped with the birth of the University of Johannesburg (UJ)—a bold and visionary outcome of the government's post-apartheid restructuring plan. The merger of three historically and structurally distinct institutions—Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit (RAU), Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR), and two campuses of Vista University in Soweto and Daveyton—formed one of the country's most transformative academic projects.

Conceived during the first decade of democracy, the merger was both necessary and disruptive. It aimed to open access across racial and socio-economic lines but was met with significant resistance. At institutions like RAU, long considered a bastion of Afrikaner academic tradition, concerns emerged over academic dilution, cultural displacement, and institutional loss. As one RAU Senate statement noted at the time, "The proposal places the future of these two institutions at serious risk."

These anxieties weren't unfounded. For many, it was more than a bureaucratic merger; it challenged deep-rooted identities. Some likened the change to an existential crisis, a threat to self-determination cloaked in educational reform. Like Luddites fearing mechanisation, critics predicted institutional collapse and cultural erosion.

The turning point came in 2001, when then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, appointed a National Working Group to steer the national plan for higher education restructuring. The vision was clear: to reduce public institutions from 36 to 21 and create more efficient, equitable, and socially responsive universities. UJ would emerge as one of six new comprehensive universities—blending academic and vocational education while reflecting the country's democratic aspirations.

Momentum built after the formal merger announcement on 31 May 2002, with the integration becoming official on 1 January 2005. Minister Asmal's framing was powerful: "The higher education landscape is well on its way to reflecting the values, ethos and aspirations of our democracy, away from the false divisions of the apartheid past."

From its inception, UJ represented more than a structural realignment—it embodied a promise. With a combined initial student population of 44,000—25,000 from RAU, 16,000 from TWR and 3,000 from Vista campuses—the new university emerged as a symbol of national transformation. It also integrated more than 3,000 staff members across its merged campuses. For many, it was the fulfilment of a national commitment that "the doors of learning and culture shall be open to all."

A gift to South Africa's higher education sector

It's no exaggeration to say the architects of UJ's merger couldn't have foreseen the scale of its success. From the outset, UJ defied sceptics, becoming South Africa's second-largest residential university and a leading example that access and excellence can co-exist. With over 55,000 students, seven faculties, and the College of Business and Economics—including the standout Johannesburg Business School—UJ has become a national asset.

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Rising in global rankings

UJ's consistent ascent in global university rankings is a testament to the strength of its academic programmes, impactful research, and commitment to societal relevance. These rankings validate UJ's position as an international university of choice, anchored in Africa and shaping the future. They also spotlight our achievements across research, teaching, and sustainability—boosting our local and global reputation. By aligning academic excellence with social impact, UJ continues to set a benchmark for progressive, high-performing institutions worldwide.

Rooted in transformation, UJ continues to uplift communities by producing first-generation graduates, pioneering research, and shaping higher education across the continent.



The strength of UJ's programmes continues to attract world-class institutions, reinforcing its international standing and enhancing the student and staff experience.



Strategic partnerships with global universities

UJ's global rankings have been instrumental in forging prestigious academic partnerships across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean. These collaborations enrich both teaching and research, opening doors to scholarships, staff exchanges, and expanded academic horizons.

The strength of UJ's programmes continues to attract world-class institutions, reinforcing its international standing and enhancing the student and staff experience. These partnerships are a cornerstone in preparing students to be globally competent, forward-thinking professionals.

On campus, this global ethos is matched by a vibrant, multidisciplinary environment where innovation thrives. UJ empowers students to unlock their potential and become agile graduates equipped for the demands of a rapidly evolving world.



UJ Milestones



2005

Formation of UJ; Prof Ihron Rensburg appointed as first Vice-Chancellor



2006

First Graduation Ceremony



2007

Centre for Social Development in Africa established



2010

Achieved Comprehensive University Status; Launch of GES Strategy; Funda UJabule Teaching School established



2011

Soweto Campus unveiled by Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe



2012

UJ Academy established



2015

Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study (JIAS) launched



2017

4IR Strategy introduced College of Business and Economics (CBE) established



2018

Prof Tshilidzi Marwala inaugurated as Vice-Chancellor



2019

Johannesburg Business School (JBS) established



2022

Prof Letlhokwa Mpedi appointed as Vice-Chancellor



2024

Strategy 2035 launched — future-focused education roadmap

UJ continues to leap into a future that will change the nature of ordinary dreams to extraordinary global attainments.



Our Future Reimagined

UJ continues to leap into a future that will change the nature of ordinary dreams to extraordinary global attainments. The edge to cut through expectations; the awe-inspiring turns we took to develop a global brand of this magnitude; and what it takes to be a great University of choice. As recently as last year, the University launched the Strategic Plan 2035, an ambitious roadmap to navigate the future of education while deepening its societal impact. Aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Strategic Plan 2035 reaffirms UJ's commitment to addressing global challenges like climate change, inequality, and access to quality education. This transformative strategy places UJ at the forefront of sustainability, innovation, and global collaboration.



UJ Tops SA in Engineering and Tech

The University of Johannesburg leads national rankings with future-focused research and teaching

Global rankings place UJ at the top in South Africa for key disciplines powering the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

UJ has been named South Africa's top institution for Engineering and Computer Science in the 2025 Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings by Subject. The rankings, released in January 2025, reflect global excellence in research and teaching — and place UJ ahead of long-standing competitors in a range of STEM fields.

This recognition comes as UJ also retains its #1 national position in Business, Economics, and Physical Sciences — affirming the university's growing international influence and academic leadership.

“These outcomes are the result of our strategic focus on research, innovation, and education aligned to societal impact”

says UJ Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Letlhokwa Mpedi.

UJ RANKINGS HIGHLIGHTS 2024/25



#1 IN AFRICA & SOUTH AFRICA
– THE Sub-Saharan Africa University Rankings 2024



#312 GLOBALLY
– QS World University Rankings 2025 (Top 4 in Africa)



#1 IN AFRICA, #23 GLOBALLY
– THE Impact Rankings 2025 (Sustainable Development)



TOP 10 GLOBALLY FOR SDGs:
• **#2** – No Poverty (SDG 1)
• **#4** – Decent Work (SDG 8) and Partnerships (SDG 17)



#1 IN AFRICA
– THE Young University Rankings 2024 (60th Globally)



