

FOCUS

STAFF NEWSLETTER
ISSUE 1 | 2020



Living in a COVID-19 world

Define tomorrow.



From the

Vice-Chancellor's Desk

Dear Unisans

As I write this I am seated in my study at home, preparing for yet another Teams meeting, which is soon to be followed by one-on-one sessions with some of my executive team. Mine is a “normal” working day that is being echoed by so many Unisans, and indeed, our nation and the world at large, as we are sequestered in our homes, our movements and freedoms at the mercy of a virus that holds us captive.

And yet, does this virus truly hold us captive? As we have moved more deeply into lockdown, with each passing week I have begun to realise and appreciate, firstly, the indomitable spirit that this and other nations are demonstrating. The survival instincts that have ensured the survival of our species over millennia have once again come to the fore, perhaps offering a timely reminder to a world that may have become complacent in its acceptance of the good life. We are harnessing our collective knowledge, skills, and capabilities to ensure that we prevail—and I have no doubt that we will.

But secondly, and this is the point that I wish to emphasise, Unisa has similarly demonstrated an indomitable spirit, and Unisans en masse have put their hands up and demonstrated in deed and action, their loyalty to this university and our most valued customers, our students. I have been struck and deeply touched by the love and loyalty demonstrated by our staff, to Unisa.

Those working from home have overwhelmingly been at their posts, diligently performing their duties and making sacrifices to ensure that our core business continues. Then there are those staff who must come into work every day to perform duties which cannot be done from home: staff such as security, cleaning staff, and all essential services staff. What a revelation! Despite the dangers to their own health they have arrived every day, cheerful and uncomplaining, and done their jobs with excellence.

Our ICT staff have worked long hours and I have many reports of staff making themselves available day and night to resolve issues that are crucial for our continued operations. Our academics and their leadership have demonstrated similar loyalty and commitment. They have been working extensively to ensure that our students receive the best possible learning experience, even as they, like everyone else, must deal with the education of their own children or grandchildren, under the same roof.

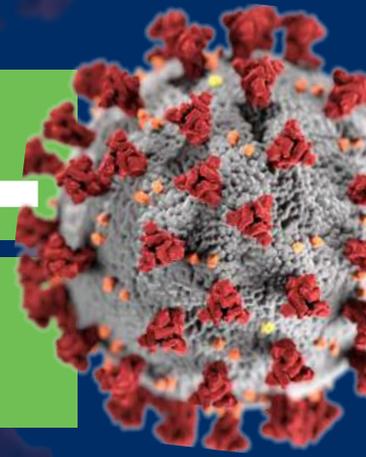
I also receive regular calls from staff who are unable to come to work and who are not online, such as our gardening corps and SMPD, enquiring as to our wellbeing and always indicating how much they love and miss this university and their colleagues. They can't wait to return! Colleagues, if ever there was any doubt as to the commitment of our staff to this university and our students, let it be laid to rest. This lockdown experience is demonstrating to me that Unisa undeniably has the potential to reach the lofty heights we have set out in our vision. It has taken a virus and a lockdown to shake us out of our apathy and prove that point.

Covid-19 offers us an opportunity to reflect on our attitudes, our conduct, and, perhaps most importantly, what this university means to us as its staff, and what it has done and is doing in ensuring that we are able to feed and educate our families and ourselves at a time when so many have absolutely nothing. I know that I am so grateful to Unisa, not only for the role that it has played in my own life as a staff member, but also as the educator of more than one-third of this country's students. However, I also know that Covid-19 has demonstrated the urgency of moving online, with excellence, and, going forward, this will be the focus of our efforts.

I would like to thank our Unisa staff for their contributions to our beloved university at a time of crisis and encourage you all to exhibit the same loyalty, hard work and commitment to our students once you are advised to return to your offices. In the meantime, let me remind us all not to let up on our vigilance in ensuring our own, as well as the safety and good health of others.

Bless you all!

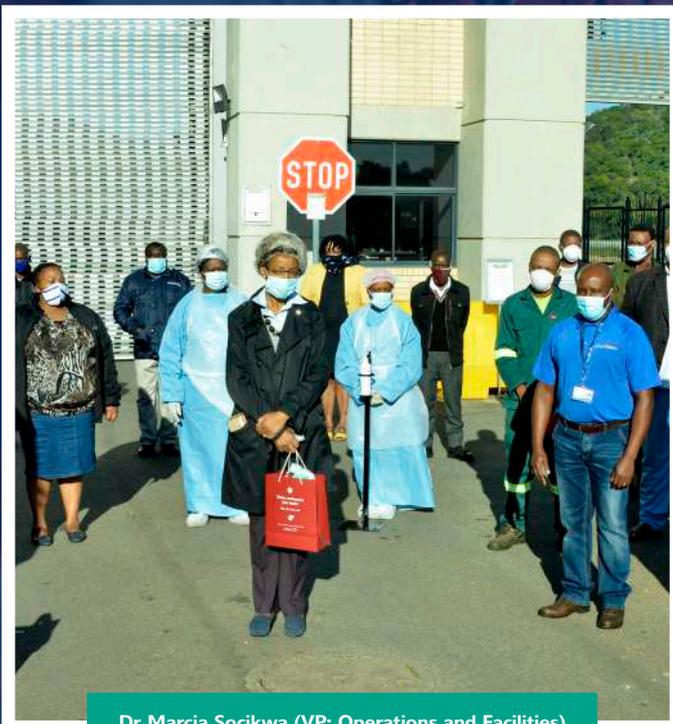
ESSENTIAL WORKERS



Dr Marcia Socikwa (VP: Operations and Facilities)

Covid-19 has brought the country to a standstill and most sectors, including higher education, are affected. While many Unisa staff members were unable to report for duty because of the pandemic, some essential services had to carry on. Behind this continuity were courageous, selfless employees who kept the university open and operational.

Unisa held a 'welcome-back' session on 12 May 2020 for staff members who, under the stage 4 lockdown, were permitted to report for duty. The session was led by the Vice-Principal for Operations and Facilities, Dr Marcia Socikwa. While acknowledging that it could not have been easy for the institution's essential workers, Socikwa appreciates their hard work and dedication for keeping the university safe and running. "Essential services have been working quietly looking after the university assets and supporting compliance with Covid-19 regulations whilst most of us are working from our homes. They are exposed to uncertain public spaces and transport challenges, and still come to work. They work as a team and never complain."



Dr Marcia Socikwa (VP: Operations and Facilities) welcomes back staff to Unisa.

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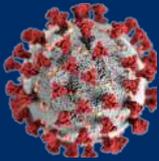
Staff on campus are adapting to the new access control measures.

< FROM PAGE 3

The university is not willing to gamble with lives but continues to flatten the curve by educating Unisans and the public, as well as by complying with the lockdown regulations. It provides essential workers with protective gear and equipment such as cloth masks, facial shields, disposable gloves, and sanitisers.

Relevant managers are part of the Covid-19 committee as a measure to ensure all their emerging concerns are addressed. Permits are also provided for relevant staff to ensure that they are able to travel without constraints. Also important are the screening services that have been introduced to ensure psychological comfort around anxieties related to the virus.

Socikwa says essential workers and the Unisa staff in general must never doubt the extent to which the university appreciates their commitment to the health and safety of the institution and those who work in it, and their efforts to support other staff.



#COVID-19



JP Matlala

The Head of the Department of Protection and Security Services at the Sunnyside Campus, JP Matlala, says it was important to have essential services personnel at work because they have to look after the health and wellbeing of the campus and keep it as it used to be before Covid-19. As Matlala reports for duty, too, he believes in giving his colleagues courage.

He explained that security officers keep the campus safe and assist with the compliance to the lockdown regulations. Matlala is proud to be part of Unisa history and acknowledges that all essential workers had to sacrifice. "I would be happy if the university management recognises us by giving us tokens of appreciation in a form of certificates for all those who risk their lives during the pandemic."

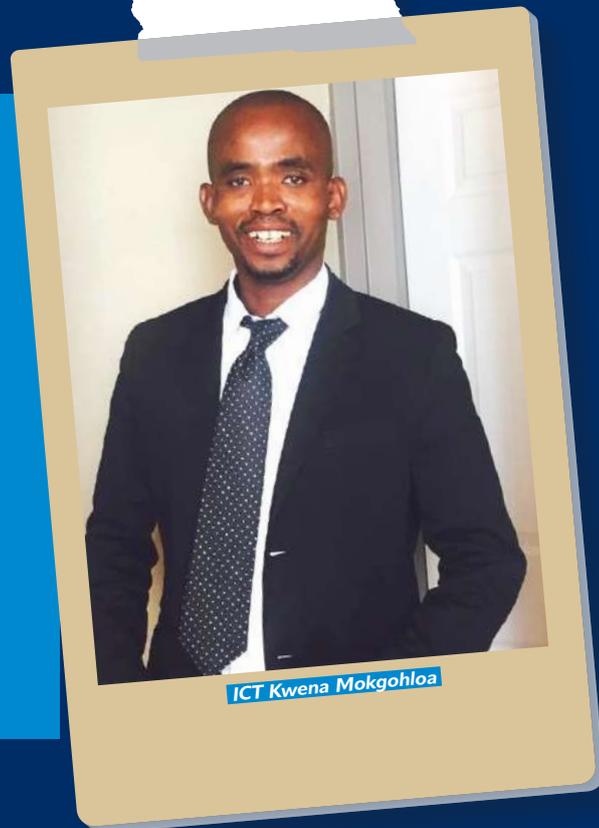
“

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As part of essential services, the Acting Director of Infrastructure and Operations under the ICT Department, Kwena Mokgohloa, reiterated that ICT enabled business to continue and without it, Unisa would not be able to deliver their core business of teaching and learning. So ICT is very important in making sure that the open, distance, and e-learning (ODEL) strategy is met during the lockdown.

Among others, ICT had to learn new ways of supporting Unisans; this has led to a creation of a new team, the Virtual ICT Support Team, which is a combination of all helpdesk and desktop teams. "Besides following normal precautions, we had to manage that our team members do not burn out from working too much. Each team member is very proud to play this important role in enabling not only Unisa but also as a model to other universities that education can go on under these circumstances."



ICT Kwena Mokgohloa



Unisa security officer Isaac Mafo-mane

Unisa security officer Isaac Mafo-mane expressed that he feels safe to be at work and does not mind taking an extra mile as the university ensures his safety.

He also follows precautionary instructions recommended by the health minister, Dr Zweli Mkhize. His only worry is about health experts not finding the cure for the virus and that some people do not take the necessary precautions, which may increase the infection and death rate. He encourages everyone to comply with the lockdown regulations in the best interests of citizens' lives.



"Unisa staff in general must never doubt the extent to which the university appreciates their commitment to the health and safety of the institution and those who work in it, and their efforts to support other staff."



UNISA CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) UPDATE

The departments of Institutional Advancement and Protection Services have partnered to provide online communication for the benefit of Unisans during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. As soon as South Africa announced the lockdown, the team began with a campaign to raise awareness about the pandemic.

The communication delivers easy access information to help all members of the university understand the risks and outlines preventative measures on how to deal with the virus. The main drive is to encourage Unisans to stay safe and to not be anxious. The university is doing everything in its power to make the situation as bearable as possible for everyone.

EVIDENCE-BASED INFORMATION AND RELEVANT RESOURCES

The data and research about the virus comes from a variety of sources to ensure that reliable information is communicated. Although the World Health Organisation (WHO) is the most reliable source, the Department of Health, National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), South African Society of Occupational Health Nurses (SASOHN), and Corona SA websites are consulted on an ongoing basis to help the team spread messages across all platforms. Similarly, academics who have taken great interest in the pandemic are researching its potential impact on the business of the university.

MEDIA PLATFORMS USED

Relevant information on Covid-19 is delivered on various internal and external media platforms to keep Unisans abreast of the latest developments. The team uses *eConnect*, the daily *eNotice*, social media platforms, myLife and staff emails, digital screens, the corporate websites, and myUnisa to ensure that messages are communicated to all stakeholders in a consistent manner.

Communication about the university's protocols and messages from Professor Mandla Makhanya, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, are a vital part of the campaign.

In the planning stage, the team separated stakeholder groups to design each message for the right platform. For staff members, useful additional information such as contact details and procedures, especially in the unlikely event that they are affected directly by the pandemic, are provided. Student communication covers relevant areas of interest for the students in their various levels of study to ensure that they minimise anxiety.

RESPONSES FROM STAFF MEMBERS

So far, the anecdotal response has been positive. The delivery of communication and facilitation of study through digital means is key, given the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) era the university is moving into. Staff and students are updated consistently about the developments through technology. At the same time, students continue to submit their assignments and are preparing themselves for the university's first non-venue-based examinations

A TEAM EFFORT

The team involved in the campaign includes Dr Marcia Socikwa, Vice-Principal of Operations and Facilities, and Sister Wilma Buys, Occupational Health Practitioner, Protection Services, as well as four members from DIA, Dr Louise Schmidt, Electronic Web Communication Deputy Director, Paul Makgoane Mohajane, Web Services Manager, Phakama Tyali, Graphic Designer, Tanya Venter, Graphic Designer, and Bronwyn Kruger, Online Editor.

The complete campaign is available on *eConnect*.

“Communication about the university's protocols and messages from Professor Mandla Makhanya, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, are a vital part of the campaign.”

TAKING THE COVID-19 MESSAGE TO COMMUNITIES

Dr Prudence Kayoka-Kabongo of Unisa's Department of Agriculture and Animal Health in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences explains that one of the ways that the university plays its part during lockdown is through community engagement.

As part of the Urban Agriculture Community Engagement (CE) project, she has partnered with local community radio stations to educate society about Covid-19. To ensure that communities understand the message that is being communicated to them, the content is translated into local languages. By so doing, communities are able to understand what this pandemic is, how it spreads, and how they can protect themselves and their loved ones.

Currently working on tuberculosis, Kayoka-Kabongo is a veterinarian and a microbiologist. Her field of expertise includes diseases of public health interest, in general, infectious diseases affecting both animals and humans, and microorganisms causing diseases, in particular.

“Since December 2019, have been following the news and reading publications related to a novel coronavirus outbreak. I was already concerned about the rapid spread of the virus in other parts of the world and I could predict that soon the virus would be in Africa as the world is a global village. Indeed, WHO declared Covid-19 as a global emergency pandemic in March 2020.”

When, in February, her department sent out a call to staff members to submit topics of interest in their respective fields of expertise, Kayoka-Kabongo immediately thought of the outbreak and submitted a topic, *Unpacking coronavirus*. This attracted attention from radio stations such as SECO FM, Thobela FM, and Sekhukhune Radio, who were very excited about the topic and its current relevancy.

Working with a few radio stations in the Limpopo Province and translating the content into Sepedi, Kayoka-Kabongo perceived that the Limpopo residents were aware and seemed to understand quarantine and all other measures taken when some of the local residents were interviewed on the

repatriation of fellow citizens from Wuhan, China. “The outreach is still continuing, as the radio stations have requested that I keep in touch until the end of the pandemic. It is also worth noting the commitment from staff members who are willing to have interview sessions in the evening when most family members are at home.”

The Department of Agriculture and Animal Health is pleased that it was at the forefront of realising the seriousness of this outbreak and raising awareness. For the department, community engagement and outreach projects are actively promoted through Unisa's community engagement and outreach policy.

**Unpacking
CORONAVIRUS
LIVE ON SECO FM**
With Grielzel Raphahlelo
Guest Speaker:
Dr Prudence N Kayoka-Kabongo
Senior Lecturer- UNISA

12 February 2020
19h30 -20h00 PM
100.3 Mhz

SECO FM Poster: Dr Prudence Kayoka-Kabongo (Senior Lecturer: Department of Agriculture and Animal Health, CAES) and Grielzel Raphahlelo (Radio Host)

#STAYHOME

CORONAVIRUS MAKES WORK FROM HOME

THE NEW NORMAL FOR UNISANS

Unisans share how the measures taken to curb the pandemic have drastically changed aspects of their daily lives. They detail their coping mechanisms and their way of balancing work and family responsibilities. You can read the full interviews on *eConnect*.



Professor David Hedding (College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences)

Working from home is extremely challenging. I have two small children under the age of five. As such, they require constant supervision during the day. This makes working a normal eight-hour day impossible. So meeting all of my teaching and research commitments is not possible. You basically have to decide which tasks can wait.

When I am not working, I look after my kids. When I get a short break, I cycle in cyberspace on my indoor training using Zwift. I have even done a five-km run within my yard. I have only left my house once since the lockdown began. We are limiting potential exposure to the outside world as much as possible.



Tommy Huma (Department of Institutional Advancement)

Working remotely is possible though we are experiencing challenges with network overload. During my spare time I make sure that I do some exercises to keep myself fit and healthy as fitness centres are closed in order to adhere to the President's call of staying at home to contain the virus. I have used the small space in the garage and converted it into a fitness space. With a few pieces of equipment, I can do some exercises. I use the backyard to run.

We postponed my cousin's wedding ceremony, which was supposed to take place on 25 April. My family, our doctor, and the constant Covid-19 updates by the authorities, especially the WhatsApp updates created by the National Department of Health, help me cope.



Nozuko Langa (College of Human Sciences)

I am on study leave under the Unisa academic qualification improvement programme (AQIP) so the lockdown has changed nothing besides the need to help poor communities. I get anxious and depressed about people out there. But I rely on the Bible to stay sane.

I used my free days to serve the community. I distribute food parcels to the needy while observing protective measures at home. Lockdown is not an easy thing especially when we know that there are those who are homeless and have nothing to eat.

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Mashilo Modiba
(College of Human Sciences)

It has been possible to work remotely because our resources at Unisa allow that. Access to myUnisa, e-mails, and library portals helps a lot, especially when working from home.

The challenges we face working remotely, among others, might be that we do not have full access to all Unisa resources; some articles and e-books cannot be accessed from outside the university, and retrieving necessary information from the internet consumes a great deal of data.

I do not have a strict working schedule. When I feel tired, I take a nap or catch an interesting show on TV or watch and read news about the coronavirus. I sometimes jog within the yard for at least one hour. I am staying with my family, so they help me to cope during this trying time. However, I am worried about my health because at some point, I still have to go and get some essentials.

I worry that should I catch the virus, I will infect my family. I am worried that this lockdown affects the economy of the country so we might not be able to afford basic needs post Covid-19.



Lebohang Motaung (Unisa Radio)

Given the resources at a campus radio station, it is challenging to work remotely, so work in a traditional sense has been interrupted. However, it gave us a unique opportunity to utilise our social media platforms to engage our audience.

I have been using this time to brush up my video-editing skills, catching up on some reading, and watching a few movies. I use the equipment I have at home to do some physical exercises. The lockdown forced us to actually engage instead of just following patterns of conversation. I enjoy teaching my son how to play chess.

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**Rivonia Naidu-Hoffmeister
(College of Human Sciences)**

I have been able to work but I have not been able to connect to Unisa's system, and I am using my personal WiFi connection and data for work purposes. With my spare time, I working on my Master's in Communication Science, tending to my family and home, and home-schooling my three-year-old. I am in a fortunate position, so am focusing on growing spiritually and focusing the little things that really matter, such as God, family, and loved ones.

It has been 30 years since my father's passing so I had planned to do a feeding at an old age home in Durban but I had to postpone for hopefully later in the year. My birthday was on 8 April, so I had a lockdown birthday, as we had to postpone our local travel plans.



Thembeke Ntuli-Mpapama (College of Science, Engineering, and Technology)

Since all university events have been cancelled, I focus on digital advertising campaigns with the assistance of my colleagues in Unisa's electronic media directorate. It is exciting because we are able to measure the impact of each campaign.

I have very limited spare time, I must say. I am not only a Unisa employee but a wife and mother of a 10-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy. They keep me busy, especially now that I have to see that my daughter does her schoolwork. As a pastor, I am responsible for serving in the ministry that God has entrusted to us, together with my husband, Pastor Mpapama.

Pre-marriage and marriage counselling take up my time. Furthermore, I have registered for a PhD, which is demanding. Time management is crucial, as I do not have domestic help. Fortunately, my husband helps where he can.



Tumelo Motaung (College of Education)

The bulk of my work has been put on hold but I am supporting academics with their research and engagements. I have a garden patch that I've been working on. It takes up most of my mornings and keeps me moving. The work tends to be harsh on my back but it is extremely satisfying to see the plants grow and the space come together. It is one of the only times I can be on my own and think. I find gardening therapeutic.

I have been out of the house twice since lockdown. Although I am not concerned about my own health, I am about that of my children – especially the youngest, as his immune system tends to weaken. I try to be as vigilant as possible when I leave the house and have encouraged my children to clean up as often as possible (which isn't easy) and wash their hands habitually.





**Professor Edith Phaswana
(Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute)**

I have ample time with my postgraduate students during this lockdown despite JRouter and VPN complications.

I assist destitute families with food. Food security is a big challenge in South Africa. Many students rely on schools to get their main meals hence it has been devastating when schools are closed. I sent out a Facebook post that I would be cooking for these hungry children who are without food in their families.

Some of my friends joined in and donated food items and we were able to buy decent meals for the families. Four runners from the village assisted to cook and we delivered one meal a day at the gate during lunchtime. This is one of the activities that kept me busy for the first 21 days of lockdown.

I was shocked on Saturday to learn that one of our locals died from Covid-19. The old man had been sick for a while and I assumed he died from his condition. Unfortunately, we learnt that this was due to Covid-19. This shook the whole community as we thought we were not yet affected as a community.

Although I have limited internet connection at home, I was able to do the bulk of important work since the KZN Region Management have a WhatsApp group chat where information is shared, and updates are given.

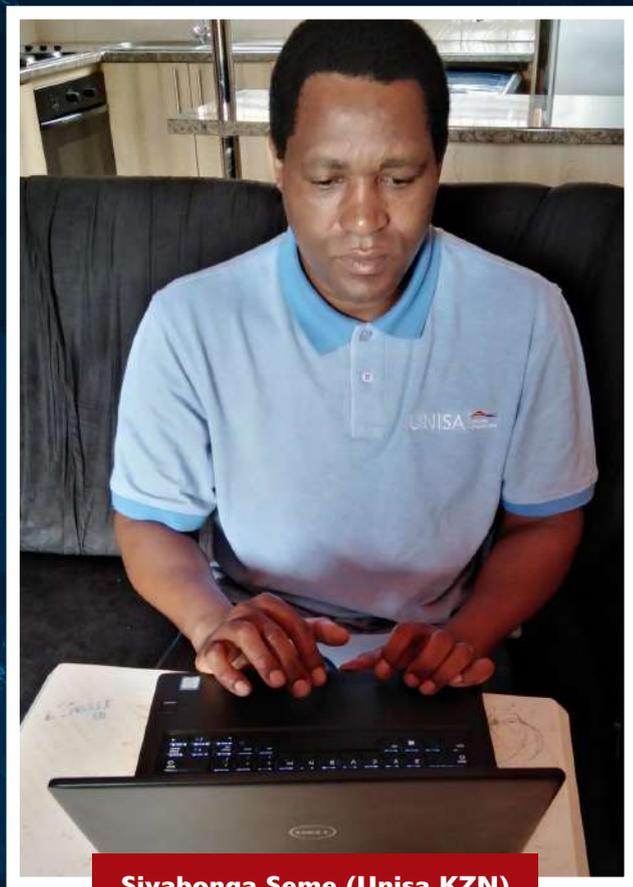
The lockdown helped me to develop routines such as physical exercises every morning, gardening and just spending time with family—something I did not do much before the lockdown. Psychologically, it is stressful to lose the normal routine of taking kids to school and going to the office. I try to make each day as busy and as interesting as possible by coming up with activities to be done daily. My wife and three children are helping me to cope.



**Tonny Matjila
(College of Human Sciences)**

Working remotely is good provided the time is managed well. My challenge is data, but I wake up at 4 am to use night data. This strategy helps me to keep up with data costs used by the rest of the family.

I do exercise minimally. But I have started a vegetable garden. So, it keeps me busy to release stress at times. I am excited about the future because there will be positive changes. The downside of lockdown is that we can't bury relatives and give support. I cannot meet parents and siblings or friends.



Siyabonga Seme (Unisa KZN)

THE QUIET OF

ISOLATION TRANSFORMS THE CREATIVE PROCESS



As we deal with the uncertainty of living in a post-Covid-19 world, we can find solace and comfort in art. Focus shares with you the work of artist and Unisa lecturer in the Department of Art and Music, Dr Gwen Miller. This series is titled *Enfolding*. The exhibition, featuring drawings, prints, and paintings, will be showcased at the Pretoria Art Association.

The artworks reflect Miller's way of mourning the loss of her husband, Stefan, who died suddenly from an aggressive leukaemia in August last year. Together with her family and friends, she planted trees in memory of him on the birthday he would have had on 12 October. A poignant sense of melancholy and absence is revealed in each image of an uprooted tree, each hole dug in the soil. The artworks embrace ambiguity and, although the presence of stains, shadows, and rags may be read as despair following this overwhelming experience of mortality, she conceived of them instead as lasting reminders of wonder.

For Miller, the process of observing the quietly growing trees and becoming lost in her chosen art-making medium is constantly transformative.



Gwen and Stefan Miller

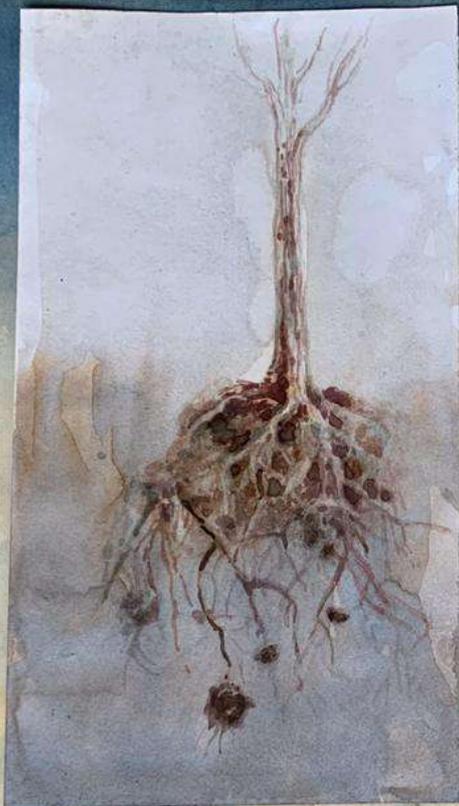
THE QUIET OF

ISOLATION TRANSFORMS THE CREATIVE PROCESS

“A poignant sense of melancholy and absence is revealed in each image of an uprooted tree, each hole dug in the soil.”

The quiet of isolation during the creative process offered her a safe space to contemplate the enfolding of life’s complexities and the value of care.

“The entire series deals with trauma and loss, but also having hope as trees grow to become a forest. Friends and family came to plant 23 trees in our local park. Gauteng Parks was involved for permission and digging the holes and giving the compost. It was a healing ceremony,” affirms Miller.

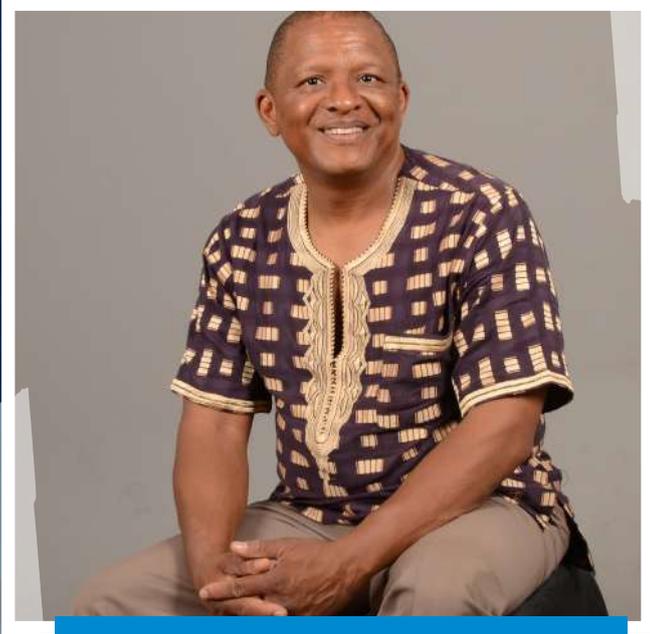


“Planting the trees and then making art about the event has helped me channel my grief. It honours the love of family life. We were happiest in the forests, removed from all the demands of the world, and that is why I wanted to honour him this way, and, at the same time, give hope to my kids and family, who are devastated by his death.”

Miller concludes: “The trees will grow and be good for all. It is so lovely seeing so many families bringing their kids to the park during lockdown.”

You can view all the images from the series at <https://www.gwennethmiller.com/exhibitions>

LISTEN TO THE BIRDS



An amateur ornithologist, Prof Daniel Matjila (Department of African Languages) especially loves tales that feature birds—the expansiveness and freedom they symbolise that lifts human thought and aspirations higher.

For some people, having more time to engage with nature has been an unexpected upside of lockdown. Professor Daniel Matjila from Unisa’s Department of African Languages, an amateur ornithologist, is one of the many Unisans who appreciate that it’s much easier to hear the songs, twitters, and warbling of our feathered friends when there are fewer cars on the roads.

Focus asked Matjila how his love of birds began.

When I was a six-year-old boy I stayed with my grandmother in the village. Every afternoon before sunset I visited a beautiful place in the bush called *Motlhakamotala*, a wonderful lush pasture. The grass was always green there and the ponds overflowing. This was my favourite spot when I was a little boy. When I was hurt, frightened, or troubled, I went there alone to clear my head and to listen to the shrill voices of the birds. I learned about birds such as *Manong*, *Dintsu*, *Mmamasiloanoka*, *Dikgori*, *Mosweleswele*, *Korwe*, and *Mhiri* from my maternal uncle who always found me at *Motlhakamotala* when he was looking for cattle. He used to ask the same question when I looked troubled: *A o tshwere legong la ga Mmamasiloanoka fa o wetswe ke molato o o kanakana?*

‘Are you carrying Hamerkop’s piece of wood with all these troubles around you?’

My uncle was a hunter and knew the names of many birds in the surroundings. He also taught me that *Lethejane* and *Lethetswana* are one and the same bird with different spellings. People in different areas use different names to refer to the same bird. He also mentioned that *tlhantlhahane* (crested barbet) is known as *tontobane* in some other areas.

This, said Matjila, was when he started observing and appreciating birds. “I have studied songs of castigation and glorification about birds; I have studied the names of birds and their relationship to man.”

Relationship between man and birds

In the stories, people find similarities between their own behavioural traits and those of birds, including gluttony, envy, insincerity, dishonesty, and egocentrism. In the course of observing their demeanour, moral lessons are learned. Just like characters in folktales, human beings have inescapable choices to make, impediments to triumph over, and trials to overcome. Undesirable things happen. How does one handle life’s intricacies?



During his stay as one of the Annenberg Scholars for the 2017-2018 academic year at Principia College, US, Prof Daniel Matjila (Department of African Languages) had the chance to tell his tales to lower schoolers, who loved listening to the stories from South Africa. In his view, reviving and rejuvenating oral traditions is crucial to maintaining cultural continuity and pride. And on a more global scale, Matjila says, traditional folklore has much “to teach our urbanised world about appreciating, learning from, and caring for nature.”



CC Derek Keats: Verreaux's Eagle
(*Aquila verreauxii*)

Tell us a story about birds, Focus asked. The assembly of birds

Many years ago, all the birds gathered to decide which of them would be the king of the birds. They came in different sizes and shapes, big and small, beautiful and ugly. After many days of debate, they decided that they would hold a contest. Whichever bird could fly the highest would be the king of the birds.

On the day of the competition, all the birds took off into the air. *Tlhantlhahane* (crested barbet) quickly tired, her fragile wings unable to carry her far. *Tlhantlhahane* had to come up with a quick plan before it was too late. In short order, only the strongest of the eagles still climbed into the sky.

This eagle climbed higher and higher, until the last of his competition gave up and returned to earth. He smugly congratulated himself, and began his descent.

He was exhausted from the competition, and needed to recover. As he was falling, he heard a small bright voice above him calling "I am king! I am king!" It was *Tlhantlhahane*, fluttering above him. She had carefully, quietly, hidden among his feathers, and ridden his back into the sky. The eagle was furious, but he was too exhausted from the competition to fly higher.

When *Tlhantlhahane* landed, the small birds cried in joy and surprise. They were sure that one of the larger birds would win the competition, but had been too afraid to complain. The large birds were furious. "You only won through trickery and cunning, and that's not fair," they complained.

"Eagle would have won through strength and brawn. Why is that better than cunning? If you have your doubts name another challenge and I will win once more," the *Tlhantlhahane* replied.

Many big birds were so angry and dismayed to see *Tlhantlhahane* arriving last to claim the crown. After sentencing *Tlhantlhahane* to death for cheating, they requested *Morubisi* (owl), to guard her whilst they were preparing a fire to burn *Tlhantlhahane*. Even with her big eyes, *Morubisi* failed to see her flee. All the blame was put on *Morubisi*.

Even to this day she is nocturnal because she still has to be charged for negligence.

The large birds were furious, and decided that *Tlhantlhahane* could be the king, but she would never rule them. They each took turns standing guard at the hole, waiting to kill *Morubisi* for her negligence.

The moral of the story

While *Tlhantlhahane* was not permanently ostracised, the owl was. Her fate seems to symbolise those unfortunate people in life who, due to certain natural shortcomings on their part, such as being inarticulate or slow-witted, may be easily sacrificed in order to save those who have proper connections. Justice is not blind, but it may be tainted, in the interest of some, perhaps because of their wit.

Relationship between man and birds

In the stories, people find similarities between their own behavioural traits and those of birds, including gluttony, envy, insincerity, dishonesty, and egocentrism. In the course of observing their demeanour, moral lessons are learned. Just like characters in folktales, human beings have inescapable choices to make, impediments to triumph over, and trials to overcome. Undesirable things happen. How does one handle life's intricacies?



CC VJ O'Sullivan: Crested barbet
(*Trachyphonus vaillantii*)



CC Alan Manson: African Scops Owl
(*Otus senegalensis*)

UNISA **ZOOMS** TO THE NEW NORM!



The first HRD online mentorship workshop

The Directorate of Human Resource Development within Unisa's Human Resources Department hosted virtual training sessions to keep the university abreast of current trends and help staff members transition from "traditional" to "new" modes of learning.

The main objective of these online sessions is to develop and implement appropriate leadership and team work in an open, distance, and e-learning (ODEL) environment.

The online courses and webinars target top management, cascading down to line managers, to create a Covid-19-resistant and threat-adaptive institutional culture.

Among the series of webinars held, *How to lead through the Covid-19 crisis* took a critical look at the tools the university needs to be virtually adaptive, as well as how to recover speedily as an institution.

Dr Gwendoline van der Berg, the Manager of Leadership and Management Development, says, "There is an opportunity in every crisis. The extension of the lockdown will sharpen our saws to respond with resilience supporting the institution to adapt quickly to the new ways of working, reconfiguring roles, and exploiting new opportunities."

"We shared the *Virtual teams for Dummies* e-book to assist managers in the best ways of handling their teams during lockdown."

This webinar series will continue in the university to implement new norms with the least amount of resistance by having dialogue, rather than shying away from the crucial and critical conversations when and where they're needed.

The HRD directorate will continue sending helpful information to assist line managers in leading and managing during this lockdown.

Focus is your publication. To submit your suggestions for coverage or staff profile ideas, email editor Sharon Farrell at farres@unisa.ac.za.

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Design: Indingliz Advertising & Marketing

Published by the Department of Institutional Advancement