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INSIDE UL

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DATA ANALYTICS PUBLIC LECTURE

Wednesday, 13 May 2026

11h30 - 13h00

Google Meet Platform

Theme:
**"Career Pathways
in Data Analytics:
Insights from
banking and
financial
services"**

Mr Sammy Machete
Data Analytics Manager
Standard Bank



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UL, African Rainbow Minerals unveil cutting-edge laboratories to drive science and mining innovation

R5 million investment strengthens research capacity, student training and industry collaboration at the University of Limpopo

By Johannes Selepe – Mosela.selepe@ul.ac.za

The University of Limpopo (UL), in partnership with African Rainbow Minerals (ARM), has officially launched newly upgraded laboratories, marking a significant milestone in advancing scientific infrastructure and research capacity



Photos
Lebohlang Mathaba

Head of Department of Geology and Mining, Dr Maropene Rapholo (wearing glasses), leads a site tour of the newly furnished laboratories.

The launch forms part of a five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed in 2025 between the two institutions, aimed at strengthening collaboration in teaching, research, infrastructure development and student support

within the Faculty of Science and Agriculture. The partnership brings together the Department of Geology and Mining, and the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at UL, reflecting a shared commitment to advancing Earth

Sciences education and research in Limpopo Province and across South Africa.

With a R5 million investment from ARM, a diversified mining and minerals company operating across

South Africa, modern laboratory facilities have been installed within the University's Earth Science Building. The partnership has already created meaningful opportunities, with 18 students receiving bursaries, alongside the donation of computers, petrographic microscopes and the establishment of specialised laboratories.



Phillip Tobias, ARM's Chief Executive Officer.

These include the ARM Microscope Laboratory, equipped with 24 petrographic microscopes for hands-on training in mineralogy and petrology; the ARM Research Laboratory, a dedicated postgraduate computer lab supporting data analysis and specialised geological software; and the ARM Computer and Innovation Laboratory, featuring 80 desktop computers to enhance undergraduate learning through digital modelling and simulations in mining.

Speaking at the launch, ARM Chief Executive Officer, Phillip Tobias, emphasised the importance of industry partnerships in advancing higher education and fostering national development.

"Partnerships between industry and universities are essential for building the skills pipeline our country needs. By investing in institutions like UL, we are not only supporting education but

also contributing to innovation, research and the long-term sustainability of our economy," he said.

He added that collaboration between academia and industry ensures graduates are better prepared for the workforce.



Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal.

"When industry and universities collaborate, we can align academic training with real-world demands. This enables us to produce graduates who are not only qualified but also equipped with practical skills that can immediately benefit the economy," Tobias noted.

UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, underscored the broader significance of the partnership in promoting sustainable development, capacity building, and institutional transformation.

"This partnership reflects our commitment to finding solutions for sustainable development. By enhancing our infrastructure and research capacity, we are creating an environment conducive to innovation that directly addresses the needs of our communities and the nation," he said.

Dr Mabelebele emphasised that the collaboration extends beyond infrastructure development,

positioning the university as a catalyst for transformation and knowledge production.

"Our focus is on building capacity—developing skilled graduates, strengthening research capabilities, and ensuring our work contributes meaningfully to social and economic transformation. Partnerships like this allow us to bridge the gap between academia and industry while promoting inclusive development," he added.

The new laboratories will provide students with access to advanced analytical tools and technologies, facilitating hands-on learning and enhancing their readiness for careers in the mining and environmental sectors. Additionally, the facilities will support cutting-edge research and innovation, establishing UL as a key contributor to scientific progress in Limpopo and beyond.

"Partnerships between industry and universities are essential for building the skills pipeline our country needs. By investing in institutions like UL, we are not only supporting education but also contributing to innovation, research and the long-term sustainability of our economy."

Newly-awarded research chairs to catapult UL to the forefront of health, energy and heritage innovation

Newly awarded NRF Research Chairs position the University of Limpopo at the forefront of solution-driven research addressing health, energy and heritage challenges

By Malatji Monyelegwete - malatji.monyelegwete@ul.ac.za

The University of Limpopo (UL) has secured three prestigious Research Chairs under the National Research Foundation(NRF) Decadal Plan-Aligned Research Chairs programme, with two additional chairs expected to be approved in the coming weeks



Photos
Lebohlang Mathaba

University of Limpopo researchers and officials celebrate the awarding of NRF Decadal Plan-Aligned Research Chairs, marking a significant milestone in advancing impactful, solution-driven research.

This achievement marks a significant step in the institution's transformation from a low research-output university into a key player in South Africa's innovation landscape.

The Decadal Plan-Aligned Research

Chairs form part of a targeted programme supporting Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs), Universities of Technology (UoTs), and emerging universities. The South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI), established in 2006 by the

Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), aims to attract and retain research excellence at public universities through long-term funding that can extend up to 15 years.



The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Prof Blade Nzimande, officially launches a new cohort of 41 Research Chairs supporting Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs), Universities of Technology (UoTs) and emerging universities, where the University of Limpopo secured three Research Chairs.

On 16 April 2026, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Prof Blade Nzimande, officially launched a new cohort of 41 Research Chairs in Pretoria. At the event, UL was awarded chairs in three strategic areas:

- **Prevention, Control and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)** – awarded to Professor Tebogo Mothiba
- **Liberation Heritage and Politics** – hosted by Professor Kgothatso Shai
- **Computational Modelling of Energy Materials** – awarded to Professor Phuti Ngoepe

Two additional Research Chairs are in the final stages of approval and, once confirmed, will bring UL's total to ten. Speaking on the sidelines of the NRF launch, Dr Theminkosi Mabila, Director of the Department of Research Administration and Development at UL, said the university has moved beyond building a research culture in isolation and is now firmly focused on impact-driven science.

"Our university has emerged as a major player in South Africa's research and innovation landscape, shedding its former status as a low-output institution in a remarkable transformation," he said.

"Just as a butterfly emerges from egg to larva to chrysalis before taking flight as a vibrant, resilient pollinator, so too has UL transformed. We have moved beyond simply building a research culture in isolated pockets. Our focus has shifted squarely towards science that solves real-world problems."

He added that the newly awarded Research Chairs are central to this shift, enabling the University to drive high-quality research into pressing societal challenges, including non-communicable diseases, energy security, and the historical significance of Limpopo as a key theatre of South Africa's liberation struggle.

"As a university, we are cementing our position as a pivotal node for science-generated solutions, impact and social value for our communities.

This development marks a decisive break from our past, with empirical and innovative solutions now taking centre stage in our research agenda," he said.

Dr Mabila emphasised that the milestone reflects UL's ongoing commitment to producing impactful, solution-oriented research that addresses societal challenges while contributing meaningfully to Africa's development agenda.

"We have moved beyond simply building a research culture in isolated pockets. Our focus has shifted squarely towards science that solves real-world problems."

New NRF Research Chair tackles rising burden of non-communicable diseases

Professor Tebogo Mothiba to lead community-driven research targeting prevention, treatment and strengthening of health systems in rural areas

By Johannes Selepe – Mosela.selepe@ul.ac.za



Photo
Malatji Monyelegwete

Professor Tebogo Mothiba, holder of the newly awarded South African Research Chairs Initiative (DSTI/NRF) Decadal Plan-aligned Research Chair dedicated to the prevention, control and management of non-communicable diseases.

In a significant effort to combat South Africa's escalating health crisis, the University of Limpopo (UL) has been awarded a South African Research Chairs Initiative (DSTI/NRF) Decadal Plan-aligned Research Chair dedicated to the Prevention, Control and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

The prestigious Research Chair will be held by Professor Tebogo Mothiba, an NRF C3-rated researcher and esteemed nursing scholar. Prof Mothiba brings extensive expertise in health sciences education, research supervision, and both national and international collaborations. Her work consistently focuses on strengthening health systems and improving community health outcomes across South Africa.

Situated within the Human and Social Dynamics domain, the Chair directly responds to the growing burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), which includes cardiovascular conditions, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, cancer, chronic respiratory illnesses and mental health.

Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, the Chair recognises that these diseases are not solely medical issues but are strongly influenced by social determinants such as inequality, poverty, environmental conditions and limited access to healthcare.

Professor Mothiba explained that the initiative adopts an interdisciplinary and community-engaged approach, integrating health sciences with social and applied sciences to address both clinical risk factors and broader societal influences.

"Our aim is to ensure that research extends beyond academic publications and translates into practical, community-based interventions, particularly in underserved areas," she said.

She emphasised the need to shift from a reactive healthcare system to one that is proactive and preventative, by equipping communities with the knowledge and tools to take control of their health and improve their quality of life. In this regard, the Chair will prioritise prevention and early intervention, rather than responding only when conditions have advanced.

At its core, the Chair seeks to develop evidence-based, scalable interventions that span prevention, early detection, treatment, and long-term management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), with a particular focus on rural Limpopo. By embedding research within communities and primary healthcare systems, the initiative aims to reduce avoidable complications, hospitalisations, and premature deaths.

A key outcome will be the strengthening of primary healthcare services through systematic risk screening, community-based behavioural interventions, and robust health promotion strategies—ultimately empowering individuals to take ownership of their health and wellbeing.

"Communities should not be viewed as passive recipients of healthcare, but as active participants in disease prevention and management," Prof Mothiba noted.

Through improved health literacy and targeted self-management support, the initiative aims to transform the delivery and experience of healthcare at grassroots level.

In addition, the Chair will serve as a critical platform for human capital development, focusing on the training and mentorship of postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows, early-career researchers and healthcare professionals working in healthcare facilities in Limpopo Province.

"We are committed to developing the next generation of researchers who will sustain this vital work and ensure that our healthcare systems remain responsive to community needs," she said.

"Our aim is to ensure that research extends beyond academic publications and translates into practical, community-based interventions, particularly in underserved areas."

Energy research chair to drive the next wave of clean energy

New NRF-funded Chair in Computational Modelling of Energy Materials positions the University of Limpopo at the forefront of battery research, student development and economic transformation

By Johannes Selepe – Mosela.selepe@ul.ac.za

As the global transition towards renewable energy accelerates, the University of Limpopo (UL) has secured a prestigious Research Chair in Computational Modelling of Energy Materials



Photo
Malatji Monyelegwete

Internationally acclaimed scholar Professor Phuti Ngoepe leads an NRF-funded Research Chair advancing energy storage innovation through computational modelling at the University of Limpopo.

Funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and led by internationally acclaimed scholar Professor Phuti Ngoepe, the Chair serves as a strategic intervention in addressing one of the most critical challenges in the global energy landscape, efficient energy storage.

As the global community moves away from fossil fuels to mitigate climate change, the demand for reliable energy storage systems has become essential to ensure a continuous supply of power, even when renewable sources such as solar and wind are unavailable.

The Chair will focus on advanced computational modelling to expedite the discovery and optimisation of materials used in lithium-ion batteries and next-generation energy storage systems. By integrating digital simulations with experimental methods, the research aims to accelerate innovation and reduce costs across the energy value chain — from mineral extraction to final energy products.

Prof Ngoepe described the appointment as both an honour and a significant responsibility.

"I feel deeply privileged to have been awarded this competitive Chair. It will contribute significantly to the development of the Materials Modelling Centre at UL and the country as a whole," he said.

Beyond scientific breakthroughs, the Chair is expected to play a transformative role in student development.

"This Chair will accelerate innovation in energy storage while simultaneously developing the next generation of scientists equipped to drive South Africa's transition to a sustainable economy," Prof Ngoepe added.

Prof Ngoepe has built a distinguished legacy of mentorship, having supervised more than 110 Master's and doctoral candidates, many of whom now hold influential leadership positions in science, industry and government.

Among his notable former students is Dr Happy Sithole, now Centre Manager of South Africa's National Integrated Cyberinfrastructure System (NICIS), as well as Dr Maje Phasha, Chief Scientist at Mintek. Other alumni include DR Helen Chuma, a Senior Principal Researcher at Johnson Matthey in the United Kingdom, alongside several professors and senior scientists across leading institutions.

This proven track record underscores the Chair's capacity to produce world-class graduates equipped with expertise in computational science, digital technologies and artificial intelligence. The initiative will also create opportunities for postgraduate training, research collaborations and internships for unemployed graduates, strengthening South Africa's pipeline of highly skilled scientists.

Ultimately, the impact of the Chair extends beyond academia, promising significant contributions to local communities and the broader economy.

By enhancing the efficiency and performance of energy storage systems, particularly lithium-ion batteries, the research is poised to support the large-scale rollout of affordable electric vehicles and sustainable public transport systems.

Such advancements are expected to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, lower energy costs, and contribute to a climate-resilient economy, with direct benefits for communities across Limpopo and beyond. The research also supports local beneficiation of critical minerals,

unlocking new avenues for industrial growth and job creation along the energy value chain.

With nearly 300 published papers and extensive international collaborations, Prof Ngoepe brings world-class expertise to the Chair. The long-term vision is to translate computational discoveries into practical applications, bridging the gap between predictive simulations, laboratory validation and, ultimately, commercialisation through strategic partnerships.

Previously, Prof Ngoepe held a South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Computational Modelling of Materials from 2007 to 2021. He also served as a Fellow of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) from 1996 to 2012.

He has been actively involved in both local and international research networks, including chairing the International Conference on Defects in Insulating Materials in 2000 in Johannesburg and serving on the conference's Advisory Committee from 1996 to date.

"This Chair will accelerate innovation in energy storage while simultaneously developing the next generation of scientists equipped to drive South Africa's transition to a sustainable economy."

Liberation Heritage and Politics research chair reclaims history to shape future power and public discourse

New NRF-funded Chair positions the University of Limpopo as a hub for decolonial scholarship, postgraduate training and community-driven research

By Johannes Selepe – Mosela.selepe@ul.ac.za

Photos
Lebohlang Mathaba



Professor Kgothatso Shai, holder of the NRF Tier 2 Research Chair in Liberation Heritage and Politics.

The story of African liberation is often viewed as a closed chapter, relegated to history books and commemorative events. However, the struggle continues to influence identity, citizenship and belonging in contemporary society.

To explore these dynamics, the University of Limpopo (UL) has established a Tier 2 Research Chair in Liberation Heritage and Politics, with support from the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) and the National Research Foundation (NRF).

Under the leadership of Professor Kgothatso Shai, a distinguished political scientist with a prolific record of over 100 publications and more than 40 postgraduate graduates, the Chair aims to serve as a dynamic platform for advancing research, empowering students and transforming communities.

According to Prof Shai, the appointment represents both a significant honour and a profound responsibility, requiring a deeper commitment to producing research that resonates with the lived realities of African societies.

"I feel challenged to pursue this work with renewed vigour, regardless of the obstacles," he said. "This Chair demands work that goes beyond academic debates; it requires the generation of knowledge that is relevant, accessible and capable of shaping policy and public discourse."

He added: "This Chair's mission extends beyond research; it is about empowering students and communities to connect history with the present and shape Africa's future."

At its core, the Chair is designed to benefit students by fostering an intellectually diverse and interdisciplinary environment. By drawing talent from Political Science, History, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and related fields, it will provide students with both theoretical depth and practical relevance.

Postgraduate students, in particular, are expected to benefit from intensive mentorship, acquiring skills that extend beyond traditional academia. They will be trained to bridge the gap between complex decolonial theory and practical policymaking, equipping them to contribute meaningfully to government, civil society and global discourse.

"Our ultimate objective is to produce graduates who are not only academically strong but also possess the strategic capacity to shape policy, influence high-level debate and articulate African perspectives on international platforms," Prof Shai explained.

Beyond the academic setting, the Chair places communities at the centre of knowledge production.

Grounded in a decolonial and Afrocentric approach, the Chair challenges the notion of liberation as a static historical concept. Instead, it treats liberation heritage as a living body of knowledge, informed by both archival records and indigenous oral histories.

Using Limpopo as its primary research site, the initiative will explore the province's rich yet often underrepresented history as a frontline of the liberation struggle.

Through this work, it seeks to connect past resistance with present realities, generating insights that can inform policy, strengthen citizenship and promote social cohesion.

Prof Shai emphasised that communities will not merely be subjects of research, but active collaborators, contributing their lived experiences and knowledge to shape new narratives and solutions.

The Chair also represents a significant investment in UL's research capacity and long-term impact.

With funding of R2 million per year in its first five-year cycle, renewable with increasing funding for up to 15 years based on performance, the initiative establishes a sustainable platform for high-impact research, postgraduate training and meaningful community engagement.

"This Chair's mission extends beyond research; it is about empowering students and communities to connect history with the present and shape Africa's future."

Wellness Day encourages staff to play balance between health and productivity

Vice-Chancellor and Principal praises initiative combining healthcare services, fitness and preventative screenings

By Rinae Manenzhe – ulpublications@ul.ac.za

Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Limpopo (UL), has commended the recent Wellness Day initiative for its vital role in enhancing the holistic wellbeing of the university's workforce



Photos
Mohau Seleka & Frans Nkhapele

Scenes from UL Wellness Day at the Oscar Mpetha Complex, where staff engaged in fitness activities, health screenings and consultations with medical, insurance and pension providers.

Hosted at the Oscar Mpetha Complex, the event provided a centralised platform for staff to participate in physical activities, consult with medical, aid, insurances and pension providers, and receive screenings for various health conditions.

Recognising the demanding schedules of university personnel, the initiative prioritised accessibility by bringing essential wellness services directly to campus.

Organised by the university of Limpopo Staff Sports Association (ULSSA) in collaboration with the Employee Health and Wellness Office and the Human Resource Information System (HRIS), the event reflects the university's ongoing commitment to employee wellbeing.

Dr Mabelebele emphasised the importance of prioritising mental and physical health within the institution. "Mental health is a fundamental pillar of institutional success; without mentally healthy staff, productivity will suffer. Initiatives of this nature empower our staff to proactively manage their wellbeing, enabling them to contribute effectively and efficiently to the university's academic mission," he said.

He further described the university's employees as its most valuable asset. "Our staff members are our most important asset. Their health is essential, which is why we continuously prioritise wellness to help them perform at their best," he added.

Marata Mokhithi, an Employee Health and Wellness Practitioner, underscored the importance of preventative care and regular health checks.

She noted that regular health screenings are vital, as the optimal functioning of the university depends on the physical and mental health of its employees.

Dr Release Monama, Deputy Chairperson of ULSSA, reinforced the integral role of physical activity in overall wellness.

"Wellness without physical activity is incomplete. Consistent exercise plays a critical role in reducing stress, improving focus and ultimately enhancing workplace performance," he explained.

Health professionals involved in the initiative also addressed common health concerns affecting staff. Optometrist Ndzalama Nkanyani from Tsheko Wellness Centre highlighted vision-related challenges, particularly among older employees.

"Many individuals over the age of 40 experience difficulty with near vision, known as presbyopia. Common signs include blurry vision and eye strain," she explained.

The personal impact of these wellness interventions was echoed by Dr Oupa Masenyani, Acting Head of the Nursing Sciences Department.

"It helps me release workplace tension. Being active allows me to shift my focus and prioritise my health. Exercise improves blood circulation and boosts energy levels," he said.

Thacia Moloto, representing Evon Fitness, shared similar sentiments, noting that the engagement left her feeling revitalised and refreshed.

"I feel healthy, energetic and refreshed. The wellness check and consultation helped me understand what I need to do to improve my health," she said.

"Our staff members are our most important asset. Their health is essential, which is why we continuously prioritise wellness to help them perform at their best."

Radio Turf puts listeners at centre of programming at its annual summit ahead of new season

2026 programming summit empowers listeners to influence content and reinforces compliance with ICASA community broadcasting standards

By Phishego Mohubedu- ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Forgive Hlungwani

Radio Turf board members, along with presenters and producers engage during the Programming Summit to review audience feedback and develop strategies for community-focused broadcasting.

Radio Turf hosted its 2026 annual programming summit at the University of Limpopo, R40 Conference Hall. The summit facilitated a direct engagement between the station and members of the Mankweng community to collaboratively shape the station's future

Scheduled ahead of the programming cycle launch on May 1, 2026, the summit underscores Radio Turf's dedication to meeting the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) mandates, which prioritise active community participation in broadcasting.

Established in 1994 as an integral part of UL, the campus based station has matured in to a robust platform where listeners directly influence content by engaging directly with programming and contribute ideas for continuous improvement.

Addressing the summit, Station Manager Makwena Mamadi

welcomed the delegates, describing the session as an important moment in the station's trajectory.

"This meeting marks a major step towards realising our station's full potential and improving our programming to deliver community-driven content that informs, educates and entertains," Mamadi remarked.



Scores of community members attended the Radio Turf Programming Summit to contribute ideas aimed at strengthening the station's content and enhancing communication with its audiences.

Matabo Mathekga, Chairperson of the Programming Committee of the Board,, outlined the summit's core objectives, which focused on optimising content delivery, enhancing programming quality, and fostering deeper audience engagement.

To facilitate meaningful outcomes, participants were divided into three groups representing the station's primary content areas: Music, News, and Entertainment. These sessions enabled participants to engage in-depth on how to maximise the relevance and impact of Radio Turf's content.

The summit also provided listeners with a direct platform to articulate their expectations and share feedback, offering valuable insights into audience preferences and community needs. In response, Radio Turf management pledged to integrate the feedback received into the upcoming programming cycle, ensuring future broadcasts better reflect the community.

Presenter and Master of Arts student Itumeleng Dipela expressed gratitude for the strong community turnout and active participation.

"I'm pleased that the summit was a success and that the community united with us as we strive to build a new Radio Turf that embodies our local identity and fosters active participation," she said.

"This meeting marks a major step towards realising our station's full potential and improving our programming to deliver community-driven content that informs, educates and entertains."



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