



Walter Sisulu University

In pursuit of excellence



Walter Sisulu University Alumni Relations Office Newsletter
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FOREWORD

YOUR STORY STARTED HERE; LET'S WRITE THE NEXT CHAPTER TOGETHER.



It is with great pleasure and privilege that we present the first edition of the Walter Sisulu University Alumni Relations Newsletter. This inaugural publication provides an update on key alumni activities for 2025. The newsletter will be published annually and is dedicated to strengthening the bond between the University and its graduates, fostering meaningful partnerships, and promoting the Walter Sisulu University brand.

In recent years, the University has reflected on its shortcomings, particularly the gap that existed between the institution and its graduates. This realization led to the establishment and institutionalisation of the Alumni Relations Office (ARO) in February 2025. As we move forward, we embrace this new trajectory of investing in strong and meaningful relationships with our alumni and friends of Walter Sisulu University.

This renewed focus marks a significant step in University's growth and transformation alignment with Vision 2030. Our Alumni now constitute an extension of the University faculty, playing a critical role in its development and long-term sustainability. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the entire WSU community for the continued support shown thus far, and I call upon all stakeholders to remain engaged with the University through enhanced partnerships and collaborative initiatives.

Sincerely,
Sandiso Mbongo (Mr)
Deputy Director (Acting)
Alumni Relations Office (ARO); Walter Sisulu University

Our Vision

The office aspires to be a dynamic and impactful Alumni Relations Office that fosters a lifelong connection between Walter Sisulu University and its alumni, promoting a shared sense of pride, loyalty, and commitment to the university's growth and success. As part of Walter Sisulu University's pursuit of becoming an impactful, technology-infused African university by 2030, the ARO plays a vital role in enhancing relationships between the university and its alumni community.

Mission

To develop and nurture relationships with Walter Sisulu University alumni, providing opportunities for engagement, networking, and collaboration that benefit both the alumni and the university, while promoting the WSU brand and values.

Objectives

1. To build and maintain a strong alumni network: Develop a robust database of WSU graduates and establish effective communication channels to keep them informed about university news, events, and opportunities.
2. To foster alumni engagement and participation: Create opportunities for alumni to connect with each other, share their experiences, and contribute to the university's growth and development.
3. To generate financial support: Coordinate fundraising initiatives that contribute to WSU's financial sustainability strategy and support the university's vision.
4. To promote the WSU brand: Engage alumni in sharing WSU success stories and promoting the university's reputation through ambassadorship and advocacy.



Target Audience

Primary audience:

Walter Sisulu University alumni (graduates and former students)

Secondary audiences:

- Current WSU students
- Faculties and staff
- Business partners and industry leaders
- Other universities and higher education institutions

Convocation and other stakeholders

By focusing on these key areas, the Alumni Relations Office aims to build a strong, engaged, and supportive alumni community that contributes to the university's success and growth.

Our Mandate

Alumni Engagement: Develop strategic partnerships, networking, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities that benefit our alumni and the university.

Alumni Fundraising: Coordinate initiatives that contribute to WSU's financial sustainability strategy.

Ambassadorship: Engage alumni in sharing WSU success stories and promoting the university's reputation.

Alumni Data Management: Develop and maintain a database to track and monitor WSU graduates, building networks and fostering connections.

Internationalisation: Identify and profile WSU alumni globally to build an international network that will foster relations and identify fundraising opportunities.

Get Involved

We collaborate with various stakeholders, including:

- Faculties and students
- Alumni
- Business partners
- Other universities
- Convocation

Stay Connected

Join us in shaping the future of Walter Sisulu University. Stay updated on alumni news, events, and opportunities by following us on social media or accessing our webpage on www.wsu.ac.za and click on Alumni page.

NEWS FLASH! WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY ALUMNI NOMINATED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE OCEAN G20!



WSU Biological Sciences graduate Noluyolo Vundisa, 44, flew the flag of her alma mater high by participating in the prestigious Ocean G20 Summit that brought together some of the world's finest environmental scientists for discussions around the integration of ocean issues into global policy and promote inclusive, science-based ocean solutions. The Ocean G20 Summit event was held in Cape Town from 4-5 November.

Vundisa, who was thrilled to have taken part in the event, recalled how she participated in the promotion of sustainable aquaculture practices and knowledge sharing. "Participating in the Ocean G20 dialogue has been an enriching and empowering experience, exposing me to global perspectives and connecting me with the peers dedicated to ocean sustainability," she said during an interview.

She holds a Master of Science in Zoology majoring in aquaculture. It was during an internship at the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment where Vundisa cut an niche for herself, discovering her passion for Aquaculture.

At the end of the internship, Vundisa, who was armed with a Bachelor of Science in biological sciences, scored herself a bursary to further her studies—an opportunity that opened the doors to postgraduate journey and a chance at nurturing her aquaculture skills.

Her MSc research focused on "Formulation of fish feed from supermarket food waste". "The study has a potential to contributing to sustainable Aquaculture and circular economy. Through the involvement in a research niche

area Sustainable Marine and Freshwater Economic Development, the research findings were translated into possible solutions that respond directly to societal needs," she said.

Vundisa is actively involved in community engagements and capacity building initiatives ensuring that her research extends beyond academia.

She is a member of World Aquaculture Society (WAS), Aquaculture Association of Southern Africa (AASA), and South African Network for Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture (SANWFA) where she serves as a provincial co-ordinator. It was through the SANWFA she got an invite to participate in the Ocean G20 dialogue.

The participation in the Ocean20 Summit, came weeks after Vundisa walked away with the first prize of R20 000 in the Alumni entrepreneurial competition, organised by WSU at its Potsdam campus site recently. She impressed judges by demonstrating how scientific research can be translated into a business concept.

Her Aquaponics concept is a green innovation that incorporates growing fish and vegetables simultaneously in a closed system, and re-using food waste to formulate fish feed.

Vundisa is looking forward to expanding her research, collaborating with relevant stakeholders and contributing meaningfully to the society and industry that support food security, waste reduction, and sustainable aquaculture systems, and contributing to the economy carrying forward the university mission.

WALTER SISULU ALUMNA YONGA BALFOUR RISES TO EDITOR IN CHIEF BONA MAGAZINE



Balfour's first edition at the helm of the 69-year-old lifestyle magazine dropped in November, featuring Mzansi Magic's Inimba telenovela actress, Lunathi Mampofu as its cover star.

The Mdantsane-born print and digital media specialist described her appointment as a full circle moment; a return to something that was a staple in her childhood home and shaped her earliest ideas of storytelling. The respected entertainment magazine has been part of the lives of South Africans for nearly seven decades continuing telling African stories against a very tough market for print.

"Bona is legacy. I've worked on international brands, but to me, they aren't as big. This publication made up our reading material as kids. If an issue wasn't bought that month at my house, at an aunt's place it was there. This moment is deeply personal for me, it's a reminder that God exists and is there in good or bad times," said Balfour.

With the world's news and content consumption shifting towards a highly digital direction, Balfour's vision for Bona is to ensure that its print and digital versions have one voice and appeal to each other's audiences. Without revealing too much of what is to come, she said, "In my role I must plan how we in print will communicate with the digital part of the magazine. Find a balance in how we better use digital to market print, without giving away too much of what is in the print version, as there are still on-stand sales to be made from each printed issue."

It is hard to believe that it has been less than a decade since Balfour graduated from WSU's Journalism programme in 2017 considering the huge mark she has made in both print and digital media. WSU's journalism school is well-known for producing award winning reporters, respected editors and media managers.

The school was established 25 years ago and offers a well-balanced programme of practical and theoretical training ensuring students become fully-fledged journalists before even acquiring the qualification.

Balfour's first role as a magazine editor came in 2021 when she worked for the Afropolitan Magazine. Though short-lived, this role opened many doors which saw her work and consult for major titles across the continent, including Big Brother Naija, Nigerian Idol, Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards (AMVCAs) and the Real Housewives of Lagos.

"It was all a wild dream come true for a little girl from Mdantsane, where the majority of people did not even understand what I did for a living. Some would ask, "What do you mean you're on Facebook every day and that's a job?" The last born of three girls, Balfour credits her drive to her late mother who single-handedly raised them from her salary as a school teacher.

"Having a driven mother who pushed us to pursue education shaped who I am today. In the midst of raising three girls, trying to be an entrepreneur, financially supporting extended family, my mom was also always studying and graduating for this, that and the other," said Balfour fondly.

Remembering Balfour as a student, Journalism lecturer, Keshina Thaver said: "She always knew exactly what she wanted from her career, and she went after it. Even through some very difficult circumstances, she kept her head up and kept going. That's a truly admirable quality, and it's no surprise she has become as successful as she is today. I'm very proud of her, and of the work she's done."

By Yanga Ziwele

WSU ALUMNA BEATS THE ODDS TO MAKE IT IN INTERNATIONAL KITCHENS!



In a heartwarming tale of resilience and determination, Walter Sisulu University Hospitality Management graduate, Mandla Mahuleni, overcame unimaginable challenges to compete with chefs on an international scale.

Now based in Ireland, the young chef from Cuntsula location in Mqanduli in the Eastern Cape, reflects on growing up in poverty and facing numerous obstacles which shaped who he is today.

Raised by a single mother, Mahuleni and his seven siblings were left to take care of themselves while his mother went

away to work. This is where he honed his cooking skills, making meals for his siblings.

"When I was young, I used to cook for my mother. She liked some of the stuff that I made, and she always gave me credit in everything that I cooked, telling me that if I could open my own restaurant people would never stop eating my food," said Mahuleni.

After passing matric from Dalindyebo High School, he enrolled at Walter Sisulu University to study a Diploma in Hospitality Management.

CONGRATULATIONS TO MS SIMTHATHILE FORD, WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY ALUMNA, BEING APPOINTED AS A BOARD MEMBER OF THE LAND BANK OF SOUTH AFRICA



The Alumni Relations Office would like to congratulate Simthandile Ford, the WSU Alumna who holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from Walter Sisulu University. Ford was a journalist and communication specialist for many years. According to records, she has written for a number of publications on topics such as community issues, public protests, municipal service delivery, water and electricity outages, and local governance, particularly in the Eastern Cape.

Her work helped shine a spotlight on issues affecting ordinary South Africans: from infrastructure failures to municipal mismanagement. In doing so, she built a reputation as someone deeply aware of grassroots realities, rural-urban dynamics, and the everyday challenges in communities — qualities grounded in her WSU upbringing and Eastern Cape upbringing.

On 5 September 2025, Enoch Godongwana, South Africa's Minister of Finance, announced a refreshed board for Land Bank. The Office would like to congratulate Ms Simthandile Ford on her appointment as a board member of the Land Bank of South Africa.

WSU GRADUATE SHARES INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEY THAT LED HIM TO THE SABC



WSU graduate Kamvelihle Kalani is making waves as an intern producer and stand-in presenter at SABC Lehae, the national broadcaster's twenty-four-hour news channel. The 26-year-old Public Relations graduate went into SABC Lehae as a production intern responsible for translation, securing guests for the show, doing research, as well as field reporting.

His versatility and continuous learning ethos opened a new door for him when he got the opportunity to host the show and conduct interviews whenever the main anchor was unavailable. "This role for me means a very simple thing, that it was all worth it. Pushing my passion and purpose despite my challenges finally came through for me," he said.

Kalani's journey to the National newsroom was rooted in survival and sheer determination. Raised by a young mother who struggled to provide structure, Kalani was exposed to instability from a young age. He recalled frequent school changes, being taken in by different families, and witnessing gender-based violence as constant features in his young life. "I was exposed to so many things that I should not have been exposed to as a child, though at the time, I thought such things were normal. It wasn't until I was grown that I understood that some of the things I experienced and witnessed I should not have," Kalani said.

In a fortunate turn of events, a family member took Kalani in and raised him as her own. "It was because of the mother who raised me, my mom's cousin, that I am the person I am today. Apparently, she saw that I was a "bright" child; she took me in, and she raised me as her own child," he recalled.

In 2018, Kalani enrolled for the Public Relations programme at WSU's Buffalo City campus, where he honed his academic and interpersonal skills. Not confining his interests to only the academic side, he joined multiple student organisations such as ENACTUS, determined to learn as much as he could before venturing into the world of work.

Kalani emphasised that more than earning an income in his early career days, he prioritised learning and gaining invaluable skills that would set him aside from the rest. "I am the epitome of doing everything, especially in the Eastern Cape. I have worked as a volunteer in several radio stations around East London, as a news reader, producer and a radio presenter. I volunteered in the PR, Marketing and Communications space for several years. I only started getting a paying internship back in 2024 when I started an internship at Buffalo City TVET college under the marketing department," he shared.

Now working his way up at the country's largest broadcasting corporation, Kalani implored his peers to have a teachable spirit and pursue knowledge above all else. "My advice to young people is; upskill yourself, be cognitive of the fact that you do not know everything. When I got to Johannesburg, I did a short course on mobile storytelling, which was a course that capacitated me for broadcasting news using a mobile phone. Young people should not wait until they get employed, with a smart phone you can do the job while sticking to the core principles and values of journalism," he advised.

By Yanga Ziwele

WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY ALUMNI, NTOMBOZUKO BALINTULO IS KEEPING RADIO RELEVANT IN THE PODCAST ERA WITH ONGOING ACHIEVEMENTS



Ntombuzuko Balintulo, a presenter at youth radio station, TruFM, continues to inspire listeners across the country through her touching stories and enchanting voice, which saw an increase in the listenership of her show. Despite speculations that radio would lose its power due to the rise in podcasting, Balintulo maintained that radio was still a relevant, reliable and powerful medium of communication.

"Radio will survive. For me, what makes radio relevant is the conversations we have on the radio, the music, and how we are able to get the listeners' response in real time. People get to share their experiences. Radio now has also gone digital, and people can listen to it even if not from South Africa," said Balintulo. Her passion for broadcasting began right after high school when she joined WSU to study Versatile Broadcasting. A month into her studies she started volunteering at local radio station and quickly earned her own show.

Her big break came in 2023 when she started hosting her own show at TruFM following her major win in the station's Tru Talent competition in 2022.

Despite the significant growth of podcasts throughout the world, Balintulo still believes there is no competition between the two, and both serve different audiences. "Podcast is great and they explore into deep topics and some restricted to radio, however, we have also an advantage to that we can reach to anyone including those who are in rural areas who have no access to

digital tools and data," she said.

She further noted another advantages of radio which included a real time connection, and audience being able to connect with the presenter live on air. "Listeners can call in, share their stories and react to the music instantly, that something podcast can't always offer," she explained.

Despite the undying love for radio, just like in any other career, Balintulo mentioned that it's not always pleasant. She said being behind the mic was challenging, especially on days when one goes through personal issues but still has to show up for work. "It's not always easy, but it's never impossible. With that said, I would urge all those with a dream and passion in radio to never underestimate starting small, and never be ashamed to share their work on social media because nowadays that is where talent is spotted," she said.

She emphasised the importance of obtaining knowledge of the specific radio station one aspires to work in, stating that it provides an added advantage in navigating its audience.

"If I were able to do it, I believe anyone can. A trick here is that one needs to believe in themselves, have patience, have a teachable spirit, and have a vision," she concluded.

BY: Siboleke Okuhle Mavango

WSU ALUMNUS SET TO PUBLISH POWERFUL NEW BOOK



WSU alumnus and award-winning author Siphon Ellen Tshaka is preparing to release his fourth book in 2026 — a bold and compelling work titled *The Dark Side of Campus Life*.

Tshaka, who hails from the village of Dudumeni on the outskirts of Bizana, plans to pursue his third qualification (Bachelor of Administration Honours degree) at WSU's Mthatha Campus while finalising the publication of his latest manuscript.

Although the title may appear stark, Tshaka said the book is inspired by the complex emotional realities many students face.

"From the overwhelming pain students experience, I couldn't just sit down and pretend as if nothing was happening," he said. "I decided to collect that pain and bind it into a book."

With eight years of writing experience, Tshaka already

boasts an impressive literary record. Three of his works have been published, and he has steadily earned recognition in the national literary space. He believes his writing is driven by a desire to illuminate the hidden struggles shaping the lives of young people.

"In my books, there is a lot I want to share with the nation so that people can relate to what I have written," he explained.

"For the past three years within WSU, I have been working on a book that I believe will give voice to the voiceless students, open eyes to those who have turned blind because of this environment, and invite those who are running away to pay more attention."

Tshaka's previous work has already made a mark. His third book, *I Think God Is Gay*, was nominated in two categories at "The Book Behind the Awards," a prestigious ceremony held in KwaZulu-Natal on 8 November 2025. Competing in the Best Inspirational Book and Best Controversial Book categories, Tshaka ultimately secured first place in the latter.

He walked away with a R5 000 cash prize, a trophy, and two certificates — a milestone that confirmed his growing influence as a distinctive literary voice.

"For my third iconic book, *I Think God Is Gay*, which leaves people's jaws wide open, I was nominated in two different categories," Tshaka recalled. "People voted for me, which landed me amazing prizes."

Tshaka says winning the Best Controversial Book category has opened new doors for discussion, advocacy, and literary outreach.

"This will allow me to travel around and discuss this extraordinary book, which I wrote out of love for God and His blessings," he said. "Because preaching creates separation, let's have a conversation about God — not lessons."

With *The Dark Side of Campus Life* on the horizon, Tshaka hopes to deepen engagement with issues affecting young people and to continue using storytelling as a tool for awareness, healing, and transformation.

By Sisipho Qwenga

MEET THE WSU ALUMNA BEHIND THE HOLLYWOODBETS BRAND

From formulating strategies for the illustrious Durban July, to leading campaigns for Hollywoodbets and its various divisions, WSU alumna Kuhle Mkhize is living her wildest dreams as the betting giant's Public Relations Manager.

Propelled by a passion for storytelling from childhood, Mkhize's journey is a masterclass in perseverance and unwavering dedication to one's craft.

Like many of her peers, Mkhize was raised by a single mother, with help from her grandmother. It is to these formidable women that she attributes her drive and hunger for success.

"Growing up in a household full of strong female figures, from my grandmother to my mom and aunts, shaped who I am today. Simply seeing them overcome all odds and raise phenomenal children inspired me. No matter the obstacles, they made sure we had the best and taught us that through Christ, nothing is impossible," said Mkhize.

Born in Butterworth, and raised in Mdantsane, the media enthusiast obtained a National Diploma in Journalism as well as a Btech in Public Relations from Walter Sisulu University.

Following a stint as an intern in WSU's Marketing and Communications Directorate, she went on to intern at the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, in the Information and Content Development Unit.

"My professional journey started off slowly. Like life, things don't always work out quickly for everyone. I had the opportunity to do my in-service training in the WSU Communication Division. For me, that was the moment I knew: yes, this is what I want to do; be the person behind a brand's communication unit, plan strategies, and execute them effectively," she remarked.

Undeterred by a competitive job market after her internship, Mkhize made her way into lifestyle PR, where she handled campaigns for major lifestyle and alcohol brands. This was followed by two years at the National Sea Rescue Institute.

In search of greener pastures, she made her way to Durban where she currently works as the Public Relations Manager for Hollywoodbets.

"I work closely with the Hollywood Foundation and the Hollywood Athletics Club. My team and I help roll out strategies for both entities—ranging from the CSI (Corporate Social Investment) initiatives driven by the Foundation to the sports development projects it supports," Mkhize said.



As a true testament of her prowess in the PR and communications field, Mkhize who now holds a BA Honours in Brand Strategic Communication, has earned accolades, including a PRISM Bronze Award.

Offering words of encouragement to future PR practitioners, she said, "Don't be afraid to start from the bottom and work your way up. It's okay to make mistakes—just make sure you learn from them. If you want to reach bigger spaces, don't get too comfortable in your current environment. Explore. Step out of your comfort zone—you never know where it might lead you."

By Yanga Ziwele

WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY (WSU) HOSTED ITS FIRST-EVER ALUMNI REUNION AT THE BUTTERWORTH CAMPUS ON AUGUST 15, MARKING A SIGNIFICANT STEP IN BUILDING LASTING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE INSTITUTION AND ITS GRADUATES



The vibrant event was hosted by the Alumni Relations Office (ARO) led by Acting Deputy Director Mr Sandiso Mbongo under a theme: Your story started here, let's write the next chapter together. Mbongo said the gathering was a milestone in reconnecting with WSU's alumni, many of whom are excelling in their careers across South Africa and abroad.

"We are trying to build inter-generational space that will enable networking. Create opportunities for engagement. Allow alumni to identify spaces where they can offer their time, talent and treasures back to the institution," Mbongo said. He called for a culture of giving back, not only through money and emphasised that WSU must feel like home to its graduates, a place they belong to, long after completing their studies.

Delivering a keynote address, renowned academic, public intellectual and political analyst Professor Somadoda Fikeni reflected on the rich history and significance of Walter Sisulu University, highlighting its cultural and educational impact, the challenges faced during its formation, and the enduring importance of strong alumni connections. "WSU carries with it the legacy of resilience and transformation. It is more than a university; it is a symbol of what education can do to change lives and societies," he said.

His central theme focused on the role of alumni as custodians of the university's legacy, and called on the university community to unite the diverse histories of WSU's legacy institutions into one powerful narrative. "Alumni are not only recent graduates or high-profile individuals. Every person who has walked through the doors of WSU, including honorary graduates, forms part

of this living legacy," Prof Fikeni said. He further used the metaphor of the "fish" approach, where graduates drift away, versus the "hen" approach, where each alumnus is nurtured and protected, to stress the value of deliberate, caring engagement.

Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Rushiella Nolundi Songca, presented the state-of-the-art university facilities and shared remarkable progress achieved under her leadership and reminded the community that the institution's foundation remained unchanged. "The core business of WSU is teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community engagement," she said.

Prof Songca celebrated the university's rapid growth in research outputs, which rose from 95.2 units in 2019 to more than 580 units in 2024. "WSU is now ranked 17th in the country, and we have set a clear vision to break into the top 10 by 2030," she said.

Highlighting staff development, Prof Songca noted the rise in qualifications, with many academics completing Masters and PhDs including support staff. "This growth in our academic capacity strengthens our teaching and research, and it shows that we are a university on the rise," she said.

The reunion also featured a panel discussion with young renowned alumni who shared their journeys and achievements, motivating WSU students to see the institution as a university of choice.

By: Yolanda Palezweni