

FACULTY OF NATURAL SCIENCES NEWSLETTER: MAY 2026

Professor Albert Thembinkosi Modi, Executive Dean



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1. Executive Summary

The month of May represented a significant apex across all aspects of our core business - teaching, research, and community engagement. I extend my sincere appreciation to staff members for successfully completing the required teaching notional hours and for compiling the necessary assessment evidence that enabled the confirmation of student eligibility for examinations. Congratulations are also extended to all students who have earned the opportunity to sit for their examinations. In relation to the May Graduation, the Faculty continues to demonstrate a positive upward trajectory in student graduations. While there has been notable improvement in meaningful throughput, particularly in Diplomas and Honours qualifications, the completion rates for Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD programmes within the expected timeframes remain a matter of concern and require focused strategic intervention. Our strategic community engagement efforts continue to yield positive outcomes, evidenced by newly secured research collaboration agreements and initiatives. These partnerships hold strong potential for long-term impact on our teaching, research, and third-stream income generation. The month of June will be critical as it marks our collective response to the challenges experienced in Semester 1, and our commitment to continuous improvement.

2. Administration

The achievement of our performance targets depends on **clearly defined and effective management interactions** with all University Directorates. This necessitates a significant cultural shift within both the Faculty and the broader University environment.

Efforts by the Dean's Office to strengthen faculty - directorate cooperation are gradually yielding positive results. For instance:

- The **Director of DLT**, has emphasised the alignment of services for both staff and student support, with a focus on faculty ownership of operations and enhanced strategic collaboration.
- The **Quality Assurance and Performance Management & Evaluation Directorates** have highlighted the importance of the timely identification of compliance-related projects and review targets.

In both instances, **staff training initiatives** and targeted working sessions are expected to drive measurable impact.

ACADEMIC CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS LED BY DLT IN MAY 2026

- Academic advising should be proactive, developmental, and student-centred. Advisors must move beyond administrative functions to actively mentor students, supporting them in goal setting, career planning, and navigating academic challenges.
- A well-structured Student Management Guide is an essential tool that supports lecturers in delivering effective teaching, improving student engagement, and enhancing overall academic success. Its benefits extend across teaching, administration, and student development.

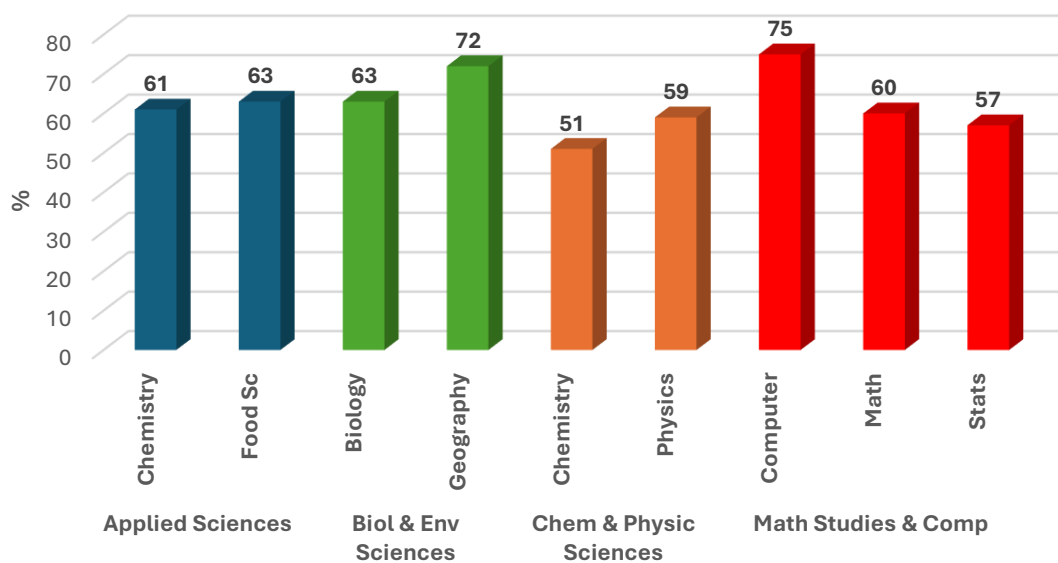


Additionally, the **Marketing and Communication Directorate** has played a pivotal role in organising Faculty events, most notably preparations for the **59th Anniversary of SASAE**, scheduled for the first week of July. We are encouraged by the commitment demonstrated by staff in these initiatives. These efforts are essential as we strive towards **formalised management accountability**, improved systems and processes, and strengthened record-keeping and reporting of auditable information across the Faculty.

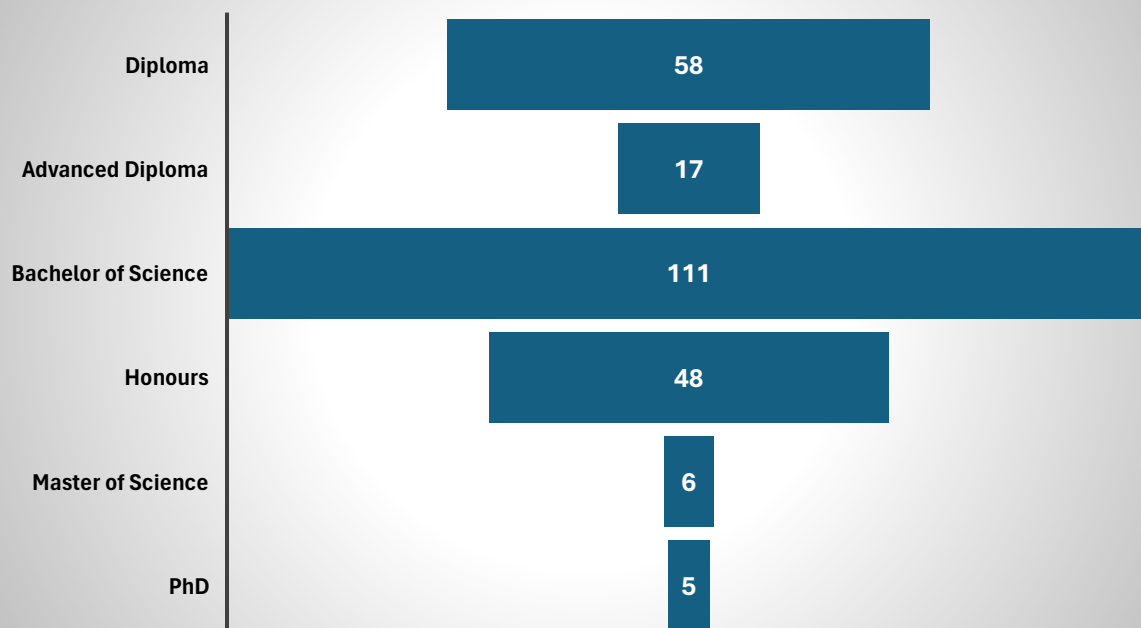
3. Teaching and Learning

The key highlight for the month has been the **successful completion of notional teaching hours** across departments. Student performance indicators, particularly **pre-examination marks (DPs)**, provide valuable insights into areas of high risk.

AVERAGE DP MARKS FOR JUNE EXAMS



FNS GRADUATION STATS: MAY 2026



These indicators will inform targeted interventions, including:

- Implementation of **Winter School programmes**
- Strengthening of **Student Success Programmes**
- Focused **staff capacity development initiatives**

The outcomes of the **May 2026 Graduation** will serve as a baseline to guide our strategy aimed at improving overall student throughput and academic success.

4. Research and Innovation

Our academic staff continue to demonstrate strong commitment to **research excellence**, with continued publication outputs at both national and international levels.

The Faculty applauds:

- **Collaborative research efforts** within and across departments
- Growth in **international research partnerships**

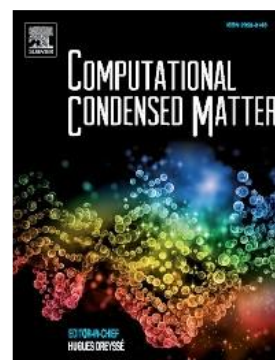


GOLD MEDAL FOR RESEARCH Leornad Chitongo

1. Leonard Chitongo (2026) Enterprise resilience and economic justice: A review of Small and medium enterprises (SMES) strategies in Eastern Cape, South Africa, African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies (AJIMS) Volume 8, Issue 1, pp. 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v8i1.3594>
2. Book chapter single authored as well. Chitongo, L. (2026). Industry 4.0 and Sustainability. In A.Oluka, M. Mubecua, M. Musaigwa, P.Mashau, & F.Netswera (Eds.), Driving Excellence Through AI-Powered Performance Management (pp. 139-168). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/9798-3373-3922-1.ch006>

GOLD MEDAL FOR RESEARCH: Francis Dejene et al

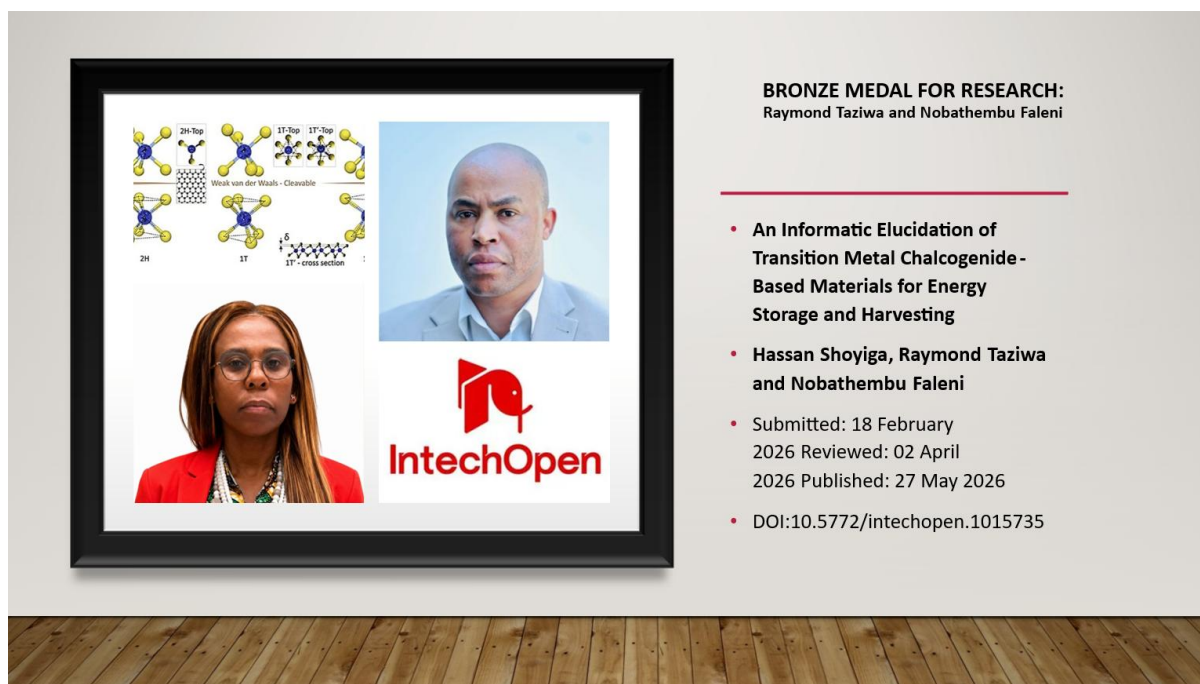
- Influence of nickel doping on the thermodynamic, electronic, optical, and mechanical properties of SnO₂ for photovoltaic applications: A combined DFT and SCAPS-1D insight. *Computational Condensed Matter* 47 (2026) e01324. Available online 12 May 2026



SILVER MEDAL FOR RESEARCH: Rekha Panicker and Rahul Shukla



- Panicker, Rekha, Shukla, Rahul, Generalized Enriched Contractions of Boyd–Wong and Geraghty Type in Banach Spaces, *Journal of Mathematics*, 2026, 8571295, 10 pages, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1155/jom/8571295>
- Common Fixed Point Theorems for (β, α) -Generalized Enriched Contractions in Banach Spaces. Authored by: Rekha Panicker; Rahul Shukla was accepted in **AppliedMath** (ISSN 2673-9909) on 21 May 2026



These initiatives significantly enhance the visibility and reputation of the University and contribute meaningfully to knowledge production and innovation.

5. Community Engagement

The Faculty remains committed to impactful **research-led community engagement**.

Notable highlights include:

- The **Centre for Global Change** hosting government-funded national institutions, reinforcing the Faculty's leadership in community-engaged research.
- A **Biological Sciences student field trip** to local grain producers, which provided students with practical exposure and insights into agricultural opportunities within the province and nationally.

**Professor Motebang Nakin
Successfully Hosted National
Forum of Centers for Global
Change: Leading to Our Faculty
Flagship Project's Endorsement
By DSTI,NRF, SAOEN**

- The two-day event took place at Walter Sisulu, Mthatha campus, from 07 to 08 May 2026.
- Eight South African universities - CGC Directors and researchers attended.
- Funded by DSTI through NRF and supported by SAOEN's open data platform
- Embraced FNS Dean's flagship project proposals for rural development – with DSTI/NRF/SAOEN endorsement for national collaboration, funding



**UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
ATTENDED MTHATHA GRAIN
FARMER'S DAY AND NAMPO**

- "I learned about Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which combines biological, cultural, physical, and chemical methods to control pests effectively while reducing environmental damage" **Minentle Mbambeni**
- "This was a valuable opportunity to see new seed technologies, lubricant solutions, and equipment in one location, and to engage with companies working directly with farmers" **Zimasa Ndunge**



These activities strengthen the link between academic work and societal needs, while enhancing student learning experiences.

6. Notices

Conferences and Funding Opportunities

- **ASSAf Youth Conference Academy (Annual Young Scientists' Conference)**

- 🔗 Application form: <https://www.aysc.org.za/application>
- 🔗 Official call for applications: <https://www.aysc.org.za> | <https://www.assaf.org.za>

- **Indigenomics Conference (Indigenomics Africa™ Week 2026)**

- 🔗 Indigenomics official platform: <https://indigenomics.com>
- 🔗 Conference details / Call for submissions: <https://indigenomics.com> | <https://iprosa.org>

- **Water Research Commission – Call for Applications**

- 🔗 WRC Opportunities and Research Calls: <https://www.wrc.org.za>

- **Wetskills Conference (Wetskills Water Challenge)**

- 🔗 Wetskills official website & application portal: <https://www.wetskills.com>

- **59th SASAE Conference (South African Society for Agricultural Extension)**

- 📅 **Dates:** 29 June – 3 July 2026
- 📍 **Venue:** WSU, East London
- 🔗 Conference details and registration: <https://www.sasae.co.za>

- **Rhodes Scholarship for Southern Africa**

- 🔗 Rhodes Trust official website: <https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships>
- 🔗 Southern Africa constituency details:
<https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/applications/southern-africa>

7. Conclusion

As we conclude the month of May, I wish to commend all staff and students for their dedication, resilience, and continued commitment to excellence. Let us move into June with renewed focus and determination as we address the challenges identified in Semester 1. Through collective effort, innovation, and accountability, we will continue to strengthen our Faculty and achieve our strategic objectives. Keep pushing forward—your contributions make a difference.