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UNIVEN graduates redefine success by inspiring the upcoming generation

Two remarkable students are rewriting the narrative about disability, perseverance, and academic success. Rendani Munyai and Sithembile Zulu did not only overcome physical and emotional challenges, but they are thriving, leading, and inspiring others with their unwavering determination and powerful sense of purpose.



Ms Rendani Munyai posing for a photograph during the 2025 UNIVEN Autumn Graduation Ceremony

She is currently pursuing a Masters degree in Social Work at UNIVEN, Munyai is no stranger to adversity. She describes the physical and emotional fatigue that came with every journey between classes. "I sometimes felt frustrated and tired," she recalls. "But with the help from the university's disability unit, I received the support I needed to keep going." Her resilience is grounded in self-belief, strong family support, and a meticulous approach to time management. With a daily schedule, small achievable goals, and regular rest breaks, she has mastered the balance between academic rigor and personal well-being.

Rendani attributes much of her drive to a deeper emotional anchor: the loss of her parents at a young age. "I stay focused because I want a better future for myself and to inspire others," she said. Her long-term dream is to become a registered psychologist, working with individuals who are faced with social and emotional challenges, especially those with disabilities. With her BA Honours in Psychology and background in social work, she's already building the foundation for a life dedicated to advocacy and healing.

Her advice to fellow students, especially those living with disabilities, is both simple and profound: "Never be afraid to ask for help. Your condition does not define your future. Stay focused, believe in yourself, and keep pushing forward."



Ms Sithembile Zulu posing for a photo with the University Registrar, Dr Joel Baloyi

Ms Sithembile Zulu, who hails from Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga also recently graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work at UNIVEN during the 2025 Autumn Graduation Ceremony. She is now pursuing a BA Honours in Psychology at UNIVEN.

Ms Zulu encountered countless obstacles, from physical inaccessibility to societal scepticism. "People doubted my capabilities," she said. "But I knew what I wanted, and I was not going to let other people's negative thoughts define me." Her family has been her anchor, constantly encouraging her to become the best version of herself. Fuelled by purpose and grounded in faith, she remained committed to her studies, trusting in both her hard work and in divine timing.

"I knew I was not here to play. I had to stay committed and do my best academically while allowing God to do the rest."

Her secret to maintaining academic excellence was surrounding herself with positive, goal-driven people who uplift her even in moments of doubt. To students going through a comparable path, she offers invaluable guidance: "Prioritise your studies and don't hesitate to ask for help, whether it's from your lecturers or support structures like the Student Council and Career Development. There's no need to suffer in silence."

Both Rendani and Sithembile indicate that disability is not inability, and that courage paired with community can move mountains. Their stories are not only testimonies of personal triumph but blueprints for others seeking hope, healing, and success. Their voices echo a shared message: You are not alone. You are capable. You are worthy of your dreams.

Prof Sylvester Mpandeli becomes the youngest ever recipient of the SANCID Leadership Award

Prof Sylvester Mpandeli, an Adjunct Professor at the University of Venda recently received this South African National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage (SANCID) Leadership Award during the Gala Dinner of the 33rd SANCID Symposium that took place in Bloemfontein, Free State Province on 07 May 2025. These awards were awarded to celebrate SANCID's 33 years achievements under the theme "Sustainable irrigation towards food and water security in an era of increasing climate change threat".



L-R: Standing on the left side is Prof Chris Du Preez (retired professor from University of the Free State), Dr Pieter van Heerden (retired consultant), Prof Sylvester Mpandeli (Vice President of International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage), and Prof Leon Van Rensburg (retired professor from the University of the Free State)

Prof Sylvester Mpandeli sits in several strategic advisory committees across the globe. These four awards are based on the contributions made by these four experts not only in South

Africa but at global level.

Prof Mpandeli is currently the Vice-President of ICID and the Deputy Chairman of the African Regional Working Group (AFRWG). He currently works at the Water Research Commission. Prof Mpandeli is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Venda and he is also affiliated with Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) as

Professor Extraordinaire. He thanked SANCID organisers for recognising his contributions to both the water and agriculture sectors. He expressed that the four SANCID Leadership Awards recipients will forever cherish these awards.

Former UNIVEN SRC President obtains Masters Degree in Political Science

Tsundzuka Hakamela, a 31-year-old International Student Administrator at the University of Venda's Directorate of International Relations and Partnerships recently graduated with a Masters Degree in Arts (Political Science) with distinction during UNIVEN 2025 Autumn Graduation Ceremony.



Mr Tsundzuka Hakamela, International Student Administrator at the University of Venda's Directorate of International Relations and Partnerships

Hakamela's leadership journey began when he served as the University of Venda SRC President in the year 2018/19 term. This experience laid a solid foundation for his future endeavours and instilled in him a passion for making a meaningful impact in the society.

Pursuing a Masters degree has been a transformative experience that has changed Hakamela's perception of leadership and academia. "It changed the perception that SRC members do not pass or progress academically,

and as leaders, we are challenged to set good examples," he said. His journey has taught him that leaders must strive for academic excellence to be globally competitive and make a meaningful impact in society.

As a leader, he believes that being an academic is crucial for future success. "If you want to be a future leader, you need to be an academic, and it comes with a lot of opportunities to lead in a variety of sectors and institutions," he advises. His experience has exposed him to many people who are making a significant impact through research, and he is motivated to do the same.

Hakamela's Masters research topic, "A Critical Reflection of the State of Social Contract in the 21st Century South Africa," aims to advise governments and conscientise them about the decline in voting apathy and its implications for the future. This research demonstrates his commitment to addressing societal problems and contributing to the hope of young people.

Throughout his journey, Hakamela has learned valuable lessons that he believes can benefit others. "Remain humble always because UNIVEN is a community with elders that you get opportunities to learn a lot from, socially and academically," he added. He also emphasises the importance of setting priorities right,

focusing on important things, and working tirelessly.

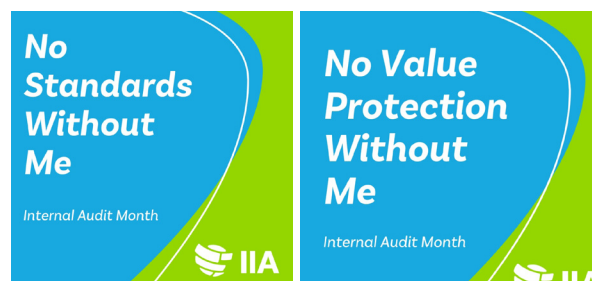
Hakamela plans to make a strong presence globally, contributing to economic growth, peace, and stability. His exposure to the international sphere has taught him that we need to be impactful beyond borders.

He is also planning to become a future-rated professor, leading in the academic space with articles and publications.



The poster for the 32nd SAAIR Annual Conference features a dark blue background with a hexagonal pattern. At the top, it displays the SAAIR logo and the University of Venda logo. The text reads: 'CALL FOR ABSTRACTS', 'Venue: University of Venda', 'Deadline: 30 June 2025', '32nd SAAIR Annual Conference', and '27 - 31 October 2025'. Below this is the theme: 'Towards Excellence: Enhancing Funding Pathways and Student Outcomes through Human-Centric AI, Impactful Research, and Operational Intelligence'. A section titled 'Subthemes' lists five items: 'Funding the Future', 'From Insight to Impact', 'Bridging the Skills Gap', 'Ensuring Excellence', and 'Global and Continental Commitments'. At the bottom, there are images of university buildings and a QR code. Contact information includes 'admin@sair.net'.

May is Internal Audit Awareness Month



Two posters for Internal Audit Awareness Month. The left poster has a blue background with a green curved shape and the text 'No Standards Without Me' and 'Internal Audit Month' with the IIA logo. The right poster has a green background with a blue curved shape and the text 'No Value Protection Without Me' and 'Internal Audit Month' with the IIA logo.



A large poster for Internal Audit Awareness Month with a blue background and a green curved shape. It features the text 'No Risk Management Without Me' and 'Internal Audit Month' with the IIA logo.

If you spot anything out of the ordinary on campus - contact the University Hotline by calling toll free number 0800 212 755 or email: univenhotline@tip-offs.com

Improper conduct includes the following...

1. Financial misconduct,
2. Misuse or misappropriation of University assets,
3. Health and safety risks,
4. Plagiarism,
5. Fraud and corruption.