On the 23rd of May 2008 we celebrated our 20th anniversary with about 150 undergraduate and honours students on the grass lawn in front of “Oom Gert se Plek”. Students were treated on champagne and hotdogs.

Message from the Head of the Department

We are already on a downhill path for 2008! We are working hard on the activities for the last six months. Two important events will take place, namely the IFIP HCC8 international conference and Work Group 9.4 workshop, as well as our 20th birthday celebrations. The IFIP conference and workshop will take place from 22 – 26 September 2008 at the university’s Conference Centre. Please visit the website at http://www.hcc8.org for more information.

On the 22nd of October 2008, 09:00 – 13:00 our annual third year project day will take place in the university’s Conference Centre. You are most welcome to attend this special day.

The evening of the 22nd of October we will celebrate 20 years of Informatics excellence with a formal dinner at Bondev House in Centurion. All alumni, final year students, past and present personnel of the Department of Informatics are invited to this event – see http://informatics.up.ac.za for the invitation.

In June we received the good news that we will be presenting the European Conference of Information Systems at the University of Pretoria in 2010! Please keep the 7th – 9th of June 2010 for the conference and the 10th of June for a CIO forum open in your diaries. We expect approximately 350 international delegates for this conference.

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Informatics Pioneer Receives Silver Core Award

Prof. Dewald Roode, former Head of the Department of Informatics at the University of Pretoria, was recently honoured by the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) with the highest accolade for service, the Silver Core. This event was the brainchild of the Department of Informatics. Many former students, who completed their doctoral studies under his mentorship, as well as former colleagues of prof. Roode, attended the award ceremony at a guest house in Moreleta Park.

Prof. Basie von Solms, the first Africa president of the IFIP and professor at the Academy of Information Technology of the University of Johannesburg, handed over the award. He thanked Prof Roode for his contribution and said that the management of the IFIP – the world’s first multinational and apolitical organisation in information and communication technology and science – unilaterally voted to honour prof. Roode for his “enormous contribution”. Prof. Roode served two terms of office as chairperson of the IFIP committee, which focuses “on all aspects that refer to information systems that simplify the management and organisation of business enterprises”. In 2003 and 2005 he was also part of the organising committee of the Worldwide Technology Information Forum (WITFOR) conferences. His contribution was of particular value in the use of new information technology in developing countries. Prof. Roode has had a particular impact on the arena of the South African computer world. His contribution dates back to the early days of computer technology in the country.

In his acceptance speech, prof. Roode said that he was involved with IFIP because he was convinced that people in the computer field should interact to stay on top of the latest developments.

Women in Information Technology

Information Technology has long been a male-dominated industry. While this gender imbalance highlights a broad-based need to create more opportunities for women in South African business, it also represents an opportunity … an opportunity for local organisations to prove their commitment to the growth and development of women in South Africa. This is being done by leading IT companies including, Microsoft, Bytes Technology Group, HP, Axiz, Verizon Business & Fujitsu-Siemens through the Women in IT initiative.

Women in IT consists of a bursary and mentorship programme that helps women grow and develop within the information technology sector, while creating formal and informal networks between female IT students, tertiary institutions, South African IT professionals and corporates.

We want to congratulate Lebogang Motiang, a third year Informatics student, who is one of only three students in South Africa, who received this bursary.
A Walk for a Book

The late King Mayisha III of the Ndzundza Ndebele people in Mpumalanga together with his subject, Dr Jackie Phahlamohlaka, showed the world that tradition and science do mix as proved by a newly published book.

Phahlamohlaka, a systems modelling expert at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), is the lead editor and co-author of the book.

Titled Community-Driven Projects: Reflections on a Success Story, A case study of science education and information technology in South Africa, the book has just came off the press and was launched on 10 May under the theme: A walk for a book.

Abject poverty and illiteracy in Siyabuswa village in Mpumalanga set the scene for the establishment of a community-based project aimed at bridging education imbalances while promoting science, physics, mathematics and information and communication technology in the poverty-stricken area. The successes of the project became the catalyst for this book. Phahlamohlaka, other researchers, the local community and local government officials joined in the book launch walk.

A thought-provoking challenge by King Mayisha III to Phahlamohlaka led to the birth of the Siyabuswa Educational Improvement and Development Trust (SEIDET), and the history of this project has been recounted in the book. King Mayisha III had challenged Phahlamohlaka to improve the village’s conditions after returning from Canada where he completed his Master’s degree in the early 1990s.

To date, SEIDET has been the subject matter of four PhDs. “Three of these are from the Department of Informatics at the University of Pretoria (UP), including from the current Head of the Department of Informatics, Professor Carina de Villiers, and one from the Department of Physics at the same university under Professor Max Braun,” Phahlamohlaka says. “Three UP Master’s degrees have also resulted from dissertations covering SEIDET.”

In addition, between 15 and 20 medical practitioners from the area went through the SEIDET Saturday supplementary tuition programme and completed their training at the UP. Nearly all of them are practising in Mpumalanga and Limpopo.

The King is quoted in the book as saying “Initially, every one of us never dreamed of success because of the amount of spadework that had to be done to have all support structures put in place.

This [project] advances the holistic approach of the society in the development of scarce skills needed by the country.” Going on to tertiary education, added the late King Mayisha III, has been a distant dream to the people around the area where SEIDET operates.

SEIDET has become an information and knowledge hub for the people of KwaNdebele while its success continues to attract research interest from scientists and engineers from all corners of the world. It has become part of an ongoing research project and the talk-of-the-town for many communities, including the information systems research community.

Phahlamohlaka says about the project and the book: “SEIDET is like a ‘living laboratory’ where ideas are tried and tested out. The project is very close to my heart because it has enabled many professionals from the local community to create a skilled educational and developmental support base for the youth and the community.

The book details how this was done over the years and aims to share this knowledge with the rest of the country and the world.” Phahlamohlaka believes that the story and the lessons contained in the book must be widely accessible to society. While he retains close links with the project on which he first worked as part of the steering committee and later chairperson, Phahlamohlaka has since become manager of systems modelling research at CSIR Defence, Peace, Safety and Security.

The project is hosted at a community education centre with two computer laboratories providing training and overall computer literacy to all. Saturday learners, adult basic education and training learners and the rest of the community. High speed access to the internet is provided to the community and the project also hosts the group support systems simulation facilities.

Phahlamohlaka says all programmes running there have tutors who are largely volunteers, receiving stipends to cover their transport costs through reimbursements from modest fees paid by learners. “The project has very strong community support and is regarded by the community as a place of excellence... It also has a very strong external network of supporters who bring their diverse and varied skills on an ongoing basis. It has created a vibrant atmosphere, a place of learning where positive thinking people-peel, share ideas with one another and with the learners,” concludes Phahlamohlaka.
Welcome to our New Staff Members

We have two new staff members who have joined us and we asked them to write a brief introduction for the newsletter.

Mr Dawit Asmelash
I come from a family that is involved in Information Technology (IT). I grew up browsing IBM’s THINK magazine in my childhood which shaped my life. I took my four year BA program in Management Information Systems (MIS). After finishing in 1999, I worked in a private company that developed software applications. I like programming and developing something meaningful and applicable. I can program in C, Dbase IV, Visual basic (and VBA) and Java. I joined academic life in 2001-2003 at the University of Botswana to lecture courses on Business Information Systems, Pastel and basic Java. In 2006, I started pursuing my Master’s Program - MIT at Tuks, and my research domain area is IT in organizations, IT contribution to Business, IT governance, and IS management. My hobbies are swimming, travelling, current affairs, and of course “Discovery” & “History” channel.

Ms Sumarie Roodt
I come from a wonderful family and am the youngest of two sisters. I was born and raised in Pretoria, went to St Mary’s DSG during my school years and then did my undergraduate (BCom: Informatics) at Tuks. Was nominated to join the Graduate Development Programme at Nedbank Ltd in my final year. During my time at Nedbank I was a project manager, strategic consultant and business manager - this also allowed me to obtain my postgraduate in Project Management and I was certified as a CMMI Level 2 project manager. After 6 great years in financial services I resigned in order to pursue my MBA Full-time at UCT. Upon completion of my MBA I was accepted to attend the GSB at the University of Chicago. I am also the founder and owner of two internet ventures, Fuzzelove.com and Gizjam.com. I enjoy a wide range of activities, from poetry to chess, spinning to hockey - pretty much anything that gets my heart-rate up!

In Memorium

Prof Heinz Klein, who received an honorary doctorate from UP in 2006, died on the 16th of June 2008, after a two year struggle with cancer. This renowned scholar will be missed.

Celebrating our April 2008 Graduates

A hearty congratulations to all of our April 2008 Masters students—well done!

The list of graduates is as follows:

Master in Information Technology (MIT)

- Boshoff, Janine (distinction)
- Du Toit, Alta
- Lamprecht, Pieter Frederik
- Renier (distinction)
- Louw, Stefanie
- Mothoagae, Motsei

Dithoriso
- Mtshatsha, Nomathamsanqa Zinhlesamukelisiwe
- Nare, Simon Maruduba
- Neethling, Marius Clercq
- Nigrini, Jacoba
- Range, Johannes Justus
- Scott, Karel (distinction)
- Tusilme, Emmanuel
- Van der Hoven, Jacobus
- Reyneke (distinction)
- Van Schalkwyk, Juanette

MPhil: Informatics
- Vara, Zamuxolo
- Venter, Herculaas Frederik
- Watkins, Anna Sophia
- Windell, Anna Catharina
- Zehner, Ralph Jurgen

MCom: Informatics
- Ojo, Rosemary Bukola