

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
DEPARTMENT: STUDENT ADMINISTRATION
AUTUMN GRADUATION CEREMONY: REPORT 2025

GRADUATION CEREMONY KEY ROLE PLAYERS

- Executive Management
- DESA
- Faculties
- Security Services
- Facility Management
- DIA
- Internal and External service providers

INTRODUCTION

In May 2025, the University proudly hosted 38 graduation ceremonies, during which 12,950 degrees, diplomas, and certificates were conferred and awarded to our graduates. These ceremonies took place at the Rembrandt Hall on the Hillcrest Campus from **2 to 29 May 2025**. Each day comprised two sessions, starting at 09:30 and 14:30, with each lasting approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. A notable exception was Ceremony Part 17, which featured the awarding of an Honorary Doctorate, 32 doctoral degrees (PhDs), and 431 other graduate qualifications. Owing to its volume and significance, this ceremony extended to approximately three hours.

Highlights of the graduation season included the conferral of 10 Honorary Doctorates, the awarding of the Chancellor's Medal to a distinguished recipient, and the recognition of nine outstanding undergraduates with the Vice-Chancellor and Principal's Award. To ensure accessibility and inclusivity, all ceremonies were livestreamed on YouTube and the University's official Facebook page, enabling graduates and guests who could not attend in person to participate virtually.

1. VENUE SETUP AND RELATED LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

VENUE

The Rembrandt Hall served as the primary venue for the graduation ceremonies. Hall 2A was allocated for procession gowns and refreshments, while Hall 3 accommodated photo booths for family photographs. All essential maintenance checks were completed and approved in advance. A dedicated maintenance and cleaning team was on standby to assist with any urgent matters during the ceremonies.

A new addition this year was a gown and cap guide, mounted on the wall for easy reference by faculty staff. The VIP Room remained reserved for graduation use, particularly for photo sessions involving PhD

candidates, Deans, and University functionaries. Faculty members were also able to arrange use of the Conference Room through the Hillcrest Facilities Team, as needed.

PARKING

There was initial concern regarding parking availability due to the ongoing construction of a biking area in the designated parking zone. During the pre-graduation planning meeting, it was noted that the construction would occupy minimal space and that the nearby soccer fields could be used as overflow parking if necessary. Ultimately, adequate parking was made available for guests near the Sports Centre. Once those spaces were filled, vehicles were successfully redirected to the soccer fields and adjacent grass areas to accommodate the overflow.

LIVE STREAM

All 38 graduation ceremonies were live-streamed. The link to the Playlist for the Autumn 2025 Graduation: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4qwrc9NpoVEgYU6yIU319vgDQeWHz0le>. There were no reported issues with the streaming. The live-stream team were always present to ensure the lapel mic is given to the functionary before they go onto stage.

SUPPLIER SETUP

Both academic regalia suppliers were stationed in tents outside the entrance to the Sports Centre throughout the day. These service providers also assisted with the sanitisation of academic regalia after each ceremony. In addition, they supplied spare hoods and a cap, which were kept behind the curtain and used in cases where graduates arrived with incorrect academic attire.

The official photography service provider operated from a large marquee near the entrance, where payments were processed. Family photo booths were set up in Hall 3, and the photography team also captured images of special award recipients before and after the ceremonies.

The refreshments supplier operated from a small tent used for the preparation of refreshments and the cleaning of crockery. Their main serving area was located in a large marquee positioned outside Rembrandt Hall. A small tent was also allocated to the UP Shop, and another to the Alumni Merchandise stall. Additionally, a refreshments vendor was positioned at two stations to offer light snacks for interested graduates and guests.

SECURITY

The University's procured visitor access system was used to generate guest passes for the Autumn Graduation period. Scanner functionality and system readiness were confirmed by the responsible security official; however, the graduation end date was not properly recorded, and there were some challenges with the timely distribution of tickets to graduates.

Each graduate was permitted to bring four (4) guests, while PhD candidates were allowed six (6) guests. Speed fencing was installed to support traffic control and to ensure that only ticketed individuals accessed the venue. Security personnel were strategically stationed across various areas to manage the flow of attendees and maintain order.

4. Photography and Freelance Photographer (FP) Management

- **Briefing Held (02 May):**

A total of **45 freelance photographers** were briefed on conduct and expectations. However, turnout exceeded expectations and resulted in a **shortage of 17 bibs**. One additional photographer arrived on 05 May and was denied access due to lack of authorization.

- **Incidents:**

- **Miya Photography:**

- Two unauthorized freelance photographers were removed from the venue.

- **Rescission of MOA:**

- **Thula Miya** was found to have brought in an additional unapproved person.
 - **William Ngobeni (Bib 19)** engaged in dishonest behavior and legal action was initiated via a letter of demand from his attorneys.

- **Duplicate Bibs:**

- Two photographers using fraudulently duplicated bibs were caught and removed.

- **Debriefing at the conclusion of the ceremonies**

A de briefing was conducted with the view to review the Autumn graduation ceremonies and, more importantly, to provide guidance on the accreditation process for freelance photographers for future graduations.

2. CHALLENGES

- **Name Convention/PQM Disruptions:** Changes to course names arising from PQM processes disrupted graduation preparations. These changes affected the statistical report, delayed programme sign-off, and led to incorrect programme quantities being ordered. A full process review is needed to ensure accurate graduate numbers are relayed to the printer, including order verification (placed vs. received) and cross-checks against actual session figures.
- **Academic Regalia Non-Compliance:** Some academics with qualifications from external institutions refused to wear caps or removed them after leaving the procession room reportedly with the encouragement of one Head of Department. This undermined visual uniformity and protocol.
- **Incorrect Graduate Regalia:** A graduate arrived in PhD regalia to receive a Master's degree, underscoring the need for final regalia checks before each ceremony begins.
- **Decorated ("Bedazzled") Caps:** Despite prior communication that customised caps are not permitted, some students continued to wear bedazzled graduation caps.
- **Illegible Seating Cards:** Smudged and unreadable seating cards for the Faculty of Humanities were discovered only on the day of the ceremony, resulting in avoidable confusion. Seating cards must be quality-checked, printed legibly, and sorted by faculty well in advance.

SRC INVLOVEMENT

- A new initiative was introduced this year to include the names of SRC representatives in the functionary script, following a request from one of the Vice-Principals. While this addition enhances personalisation and recognition, it presents logistical challenges particularly in cases of last-minute changes to SRC representation.
- Transport arrangements for the SRC representatives also proved challenging and highlight the need for such logistics to be pre-arranged and clearly communicated in advance.

3. EMERGENCY SERVICES

A team of four medics was on duty throughout the graduation season, with an ambulance stationed on-site as a precautionary measure. There were no medical incidents involving graduates. The few cases that

did arise involved attending guests, most of whom required only basic assessments and were able to leave with their families shortly thereafter.

Reported incidents required emergency services:

- One case of an ankle sprain;
- One diabetic episode; the patient was assisted by family members who administered sugar, resulting in full recovery;
- One case of vomiting due to non-compliance with medication. After taking the required medication, the patient felt better and left with their family;
- One serious medical incident involved a guest collapsing near the refreshment tent. The family initially resisted medical intervention, wanting the patient to continue attending the ceremony. Upon observation, medics identified signs of a cardiac episode. The patient was transported by ambulance to Zuid-Afrikaans Hospital as a priority case and was later admitted for cardiology care. Due to POPIA regulations, no further information could be obtained regarding the patient's condition.

4. HIGHLIGHTS

- A standout moment was the excellent teamwork demonstrated across departments, from Security Services to the Emer-G-Med representative who alerted the team about a graduate he had previously assisted with a seizure-related condition while they were still a student. This proactive communication showcased the collaborative spirit and care for student well-being.
- Another memorable highlight was the spontaneous chanting of "Seanamarena (Kobo Ya Thuto)" by all graduation guests at the conclusion of the final ceremony. This created a joyful and celebratory atmosphere, adding a refreshing and culturally rich close to the graduation season.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Each staff member involved in the graduation ceremonies should receive personalised feedback highlighting their strengths and areas for improvement.
- The graduation team should hold a debriefing session to discuss identified gaps and opportunities for improvement ahead of the next season. Best practices from individual faculties should be recognised and incorporated into graduation training programmes.
- All official photographs of key individuals including Honorary Degree recipients, PhD graduates, and Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor medallists should be taken after the conferral of awards. This approach ensures certificates and medals are included in the photographs and eliminates delays caused by pre-ceremony photo sessions.
- Investing in dedicated communication tools is crucial to enable real-time updates for functionaries and support personnel, thereby improving coordination and operational efficiency during the ceremonies.

5. CONCLUSION

Graduation ceremonies are a time of celebration for staff, graduates, and their families, marking a shared achievement. Through strong collaboration and unwavering commitment, the team reached another significant milestone. While the journey presented challenging moments of disappointment and discouragement tested our resilience, the team's ability to regroup, adapt, and move forward with renewed energy was truly commendable. This collective perseverance transformed potential setbacks

into opportunities for growth and improvement. Ultimately, the ceremonies stood as a testament to our dedication, delivering a meaningful and successful celebration for everyone involved.