

NEWS RELEASE

International Day of Women in Mining: University of Pretoria celebrates rising number of women in mining engineering



Visitors engage with cutting-edge simulations at the Kumba Virtual Reality (VR) Centre.

PRETORIA - The University of Pretoria's (UP) [Department of Mining Engineering](#) is marking International Day of Women in Mining with a notable milestone: almost half of its students are women, reflecting a significant shift in one of South Africa's most traditionally male-dominated industries.

Observed globally on 15 June, the International Day of Women in Mining honours the contributions of women across the mining value chain and calls attention to the importance of gender equity in the sector.

At UP, the figures show that progress is underway as women currently make up between 55% and 60% of students in the programme, a figure that far exceeds industry norms.

Third-year student, Langutani Mathebula, is one of those defying expectations. "The curiosity that was sparked when I first learned about mining engineering stirred a desire to want to explore and understand the mining

industry more fully,” she says.

“When I told my family and friends that I wanted to do mining engineering, they persuaded me to do medicine – a path they thought was a better fit for a female – as mining was fit for males because of their strength and capabilities. But I chose to do mining to prove that strength knows no gender, and anyone can do anything if they put their mind to it.”

According to Jannie Maritz, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Mining Engineering, the drive to increase the number of female students in the department is part of a broader push for inclusion in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

“With new technologies reducing the physical demands of mining and expanding career opportunities into banking, consulting, supply chain management and innovation, more women are seeing mining engineering as an attractive and viable career,” Maritz says.

The shift towards greater inclusion in the Department is also aligned with UP’s broader institutional priorities. Looking ahead, the University plans to expand the [Kumba Virtual Reality \(VR\) Centre](#) for Mine Design’s capabilities by integrating augmented reality (AR) and extended reality (XR) technologies into its offerings, and by rolling out immersive learning opportunities more broadly across disciplines.

The centre was launched in 2015 in partnership with Kumba Iron Ore, a subsidiary of Anglo American, the Kumba VR Centre is the first facility of its kind in Africa. It allows students, researchers and industry professionals to explore and interact with realistic mining environments without leaving the classroom.

Equipped with a 3D stereoscopic theatre and a 360° cylinder theatre, the Centre enables users to visualise and solve real-world mining problems in a safe and controlled environment. This has not only transformed the way mining education is delivered, but also made the field more accessible to a more diverse student population.

“The VR Centre enhances spatial awareness and problem-solving skills,” Maritz explains. “It gives students a chance to experience complex mining scenarios before they set foot underground, which is particularly important in attracting and retaining women in the discipline.”

“We are seeking sponsors to help scale the VR experience to other parts of the [Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment & IT](#) and University, ensuring that more students can engage with advanced technologies before they even enter their specialised fields,” Maritz says.

The growing number of women entering the mining engineering programme signals a powerful transformation in the industry’s future leadership. By embracing innovation and investing in inclusive learning environments, the University of Pretoria is helping redefine what it means to study and work in mining.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za