NEWS RELEASE

UP's Prof Vukosi Marivate marks six years as ABSA Chair of Data Science

Prof Vukosi Marivate is an Associate Professor of Computer Science and holds the ABSA UP Chair of Data Science at the University of Pretoria.

PRETORIA – The University of Pretoria (UP) is proud to celebrate six impactful years of Professor Vukosi Marivate's tenure as the ABSA Chair of Data Science. A leader in his field, Prof Marivate has dedicated his career to advancing machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) methods, with a unique focus on integrating local African languages into cutting-edge technology.

He is an associate professor of Computer Science in UP's Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (EBIT) and leads the Data Science for Social Impact Research Group within the department. His research focuses on leveraging ML and AI to tackle societal challenges, with an emphasis on improving models and methods as well as the availability and utility of data for low-resource languages.

As the ABSA Chair of Data Science, Prof Marivate's contributions extend beyond academic excellence: he has laid a foundation for sustainable growth in data science, providing young researchers with the tools and opportunities to excel while addressing real-world challenges.

"At ABSA, we proudly celebrate six years of partnership with Prof Vukosi Marivate as the ABSA Chair of Data Science at the University of Pretoria," says Gavin Cope, chief data and analytics officer. "His advancements in ML, and specifically AI and African language integration, reflect our shared vision of using data science to drive innovation, empower communities and create meaningful societal impact. We look forward to continuing this collaboration, advancing new breakthroughs and thought leadership that further empower Africa's unique voices and shape transformative solutions for the future."

Prof Marivate's research covers various fields, including science, energy, public safety and utilities, always seeking innovative solutions to pressing social issues. His work is based on the development of natural language processing (NLP) technologies for African languages. As the chief investigator and co-founder of the Masakhane Research Foundation, Prof Marivate collaborates with researchers to create tools and datasets that enable AI systems to support languages such as isiZulu, Sepedi and Setswana. Through these initiatives, he contributes to preserving African linguistic heritage and ensuring that AI technologies meet the continent's unique needs.

"Over the years, my work has focused on creating data and AI tools that can have a positive impact on lives and that advance the use of local African languages in technology," Prof Marivate says. "The importance of local language data cannot be understated. It allows us to build inclusive systems that truly represent and serve diverse communities."

The collaboration between UP and ABSA has been pivotal in promoting transformative research under Prof Marivate's leadership. This partnership has enabled the establishment of programmes that train the next generation of African data scientists, fund innovative research, and bring together academia, industry and government to address societal concerns.

"The support provided through this partnership has been instrumental in creating opportunities for students, fostering innovation and driving impactful research," Prof Marivate says.

Prof Marivate's dedication to advancing knowledge and innovation has earned him numerous accolades, including UP's EBIT Exceptional Young Researcher Award.

"This recognition reflected not just my efforts but also the support of the incredible teams I've worked with," he says.

Prof Marivate is also a co-founder of Lelapa AI, an African start-up committed to developing AI solutions for Africans by Africans. Through this initiative, he fosters local innovation and ensures that African voices and needs are at the forefront of AI advancements. Additionally, as a co-founder of the Deep Learning Indaba, he plays a key role in empowering and supporting African researchers and practitioners in ML and AI. This conference is now the leading platform on the continent for advancing knowledge and collaboration in the field.

Looking ahead, he hopes for a future where collaboration and innovation generate strategies to address global issues.

"The challenges we face require collective effort," Prof Marivate says. "By working together, we can create solutions that drive sustainable development and equity."

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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 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. 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