

Thoko Sipungu, Sociology



Mthatha born sociologist, Thoko Sipungu has come a long way from being a candidate attorney in the province known as the breadbasket of the country; the Free State. After a year of practising Law, he was convinced that it was not a field for him; instead, he chose a serene office in the intimate Sociology department, once a space of learning for the 28-year old.

Thoko obtained a Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Laws (LLB) as well as his Master of Arts (MA) in Sociology at Rhodes University. When he relocated back to Grahamstown, he worked as a Human Settlements researcher for the Public Service Accountability Monitor unit based at the University.

Through the Next Generation for Academics programme he identified an opportunity to finally pursue a life of meaningful research in how society functions. As a lecturer in the Sociology Department, his research and teaching interests are in the sociology of men and masculinities, feminities, sexualities, identity, belonging and sociological theory. He is pursuing a PhD in 'The masculine embodiment and physical disability among Xhosa men in the Eastern Cape'.

"The intention was always to come back to University. A few years ago during a socio class, I was introduced to sexualities and gender; I fell in love with the readings. They literally changed my understanding of something I thought was so straight and they made it complicated, I was fascinated," he enthuses.

Thoko is certainly a perfect fit for the world of academia. Within just a year of pursuing what he considers a form of social justice, he is certain that he wants to be an academic all the way up to Deanship.

He currently teaches a second year class in Social theory and a third year class in Society and theory, Citizenship, and African sociology. In 2018, he will supervise Honours students on Gender, his favourite area of study.

The programme, for him, represents an opportunity for meaningful transformation that seeks to balance the representation of philosophies, cultures and identities in the university space.

“There are many conversations around the curriculum, how and why certain philosophers are still part of teaching and learning. The curriculum readings are still very Western, but it is changing with more young people influencing academia as teachers and developers of new theories and areas of study,” he says with conviction.

nGAP allows him an admirable amount of time for research and just the right space to focus on his PhD. At the end of his six years, Thoko will take over from his mentor who will be retiring.

“This is about getting new faces into academic spaces through a very strategic programme designed to grant opportunities to aspiring academics who would have otherwise been lost to the corporate sector,” he said.