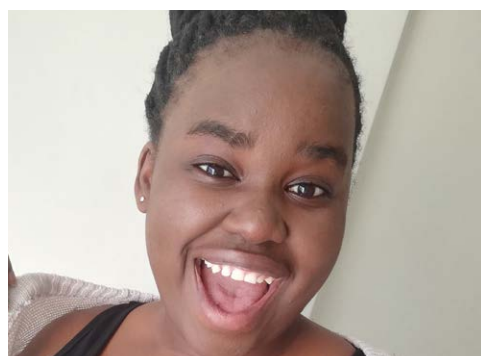
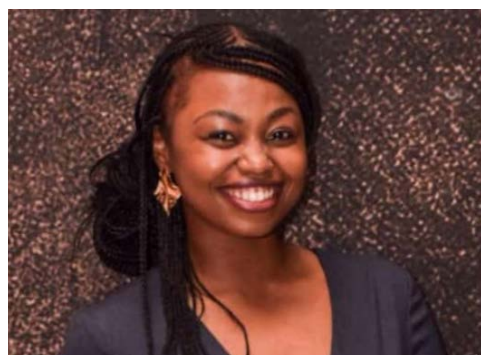
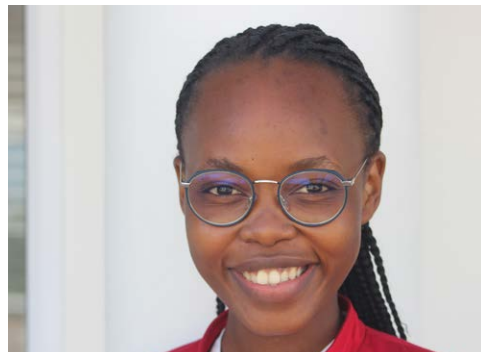




TAI 2020

GRADUATE STORIES

Here you will read the stories of **Avela, Nkosozana, Nokuthula, Sikelelwa, Surprise and Ziyanda**. These six inspiring individuals made Rhodes University their home, and graduated successfully with the partnerships they developed through the Extended Studies TAI Student Peer Mentoring Programme.



AVELA MBILINI

Claims Investigator at *Prime Meridian Direct*

“The Extended Studies played a huge role in how my career path was decided...had it not been for the *Investec* opportunity afforded by the Commerce Extended Studies Programme, I do not know how else I would have discovered the vast sector and the job market that I currently work in today.”



Discovering your career path

AT THE AGE OF 17, Avela Mbilini graduated from St Christopher's in King William's Town with distinctions in Economics and Business Studies. She credits this achievement with sparking her interest in pursuing a career in Commerce. So it came to be that Avela, who was born and raised in the small town of Harding in KwaZulu Natal, joined the Commerce Extended Studies Programme (CESP) at Rhodes University in 2014.

The Extended Studies programme, particularly its Trojan Academic Initiative (TAI) Student Peer Mentoring Programme, left a lasting impression on the former Deputy Head Girl. “It helped me very much to settle into varsity and to see that having to complete my degree in four years, instead of three, was not a curse.”

Avela reflects that the ability to relate to one's mentor in such a programme, by recognising that they too were once in your position, is of utmost importance. During her last year at Rhodes in 2017, Avela chose to become a TAI mentor herself and expresses gratitude for the guiding nature of the programme: “It helped me grow as an individual.”

Uncertainty about one's future, and about one's choice of subjects in order to realise that future, is a feeling understood by many students. Avela was no different. As an undergraduate student, she was unsure of which subjects to select as her majors. She was soon exposed to the financial sector through the *Investec* Navigate Programme, however. This opportunity was afforded to her through the Commerce Extended Studies Programme. “This sector became the answer to my lost career path. I found something that I was genuinely interested in,” shares Avela.

Avela achieved her Bachelor of Commerce degree in 2017, followed by her Postgraduate Diploma in Enterprise Management from the Rhodes University Business School.

Avela currently works as a Claims Investigator in the Motor Claims Department in *Prime Meridian Direct*. This direct marketing financial services business focusses on personal line products in the motor, life and health insurance markets. “The Extended Studies played a huge role in how my career path was decided...had it not been for the *Investec* opportunity afforded by the Commerce Extended Studies Programme, I do not know how else I would have discovered the vast sector and the job market that I currently work in today.”

Avela's plans for the future include obtaining her Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services (FAIS) accreditation, and completing her Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree.

NKOSAZANA RULUMENI

Software Quality Analyst for *LexisNexis*

Nkosazana worked as a TAI mentor in 2015 and 2016, during which time she valued the opportunity to offer the same support and guidance to her mentees as she had received from her mentor during first year.



Overcoming the odds

MANY THINGS SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE for Nkosazana Rulumeni when she was a learner in high school. After attending the National Arts Festival in Makhanda, however, Nkosazana was drawn to the intimate and supportive nature of Rhodes University. After joining the Extended Studies Programme, Nkosazana found her time at the university to be smoother than she expected.

Originally from the small town of Dutywa, Nkosazana was inspired by her mother's decision to go back to school. "If she could do it, I also can", reflects the Bachelor of Commerce graduate.

Nkosazana fell in love with Accounting at a young age. She describes her high school as "a space where your dreams weren't really a thing". It was this same school, however, that introduced her to the subject of Accounting and which ultimately led her to apply to Rhodes University. This application was successful, and in 2013 Nkosazana joined

the Trojan Academic Initiative (TAI) Student Peer Mentoring Programme where she was partnered with an experienced, senior student mentor in the same faculty.

As part of this mentee group with other first year peers, Nkosazana enjoyed having an instant network of friends and colleagues with whom she could share her newfound university experiences. Nkosazana worked as a TAI mentor in 2015 and 2016, during which time she valued the opportunity to offer the same support and guidance to her mentees as she had received from her mentor during first year.

Nkosazana graduated in 2017, triple majoring in Information Systems, Management, and Economics. She then furthered her education by attaining her Honours degree in Financial Management in 2018.

Currently, Nkosazana is a Software Quality Analyst for *LexisNexis*. She describes her role in the company as "representing the user" by ensuring that the website functions efficiently. She credits her time in the Rhodes Extended Studies Programme for motivating her in securing this position, as she believes the programme encourages students to follow their own path.

NOKUTHULA MNISI

Chartered Accountant

“I hope we all take pride in our journey because if anything, being in Extended Studies does not mean we are incapable. It means we take our future seriously, and we are unafraid to seek the necessary aid to lead us through a successful university experience.”



Seeking help is brave

IN GRADE 6 AND ATTENDING The King’s Court Christian School, Nokuthula Mnisi was immediately enthralled by numbers - and never looked back. Nokuthula’s goal of becoming a Chartered Accountant was central, so applying to Rhodes University was a significant step towards accomplishing this.

Born in Tzaneen, Limpopo and raised by her grandparents, Nokuthula proved to be determined and nurturing from a young age. She was actively involved in community engagement in high school and she had a love of cooking for others: “I love seeing people come together and celebrate life through a meal cooked with love.”

In grade 6, Nokuthula decided to pursue a career in Accounting. “I made it a point in high school to bring that dream to life. I was intentional with it all the way through to university”, says the now 25-year-old graduate.

As part of the Trojan Academic Initiative (TAI) Student Peer Mentoring Programme, Nokuthula observes that sometimes its students were stigmatised as being lazy. Nokuthula believes differently: “I hope we all take pride in our journey because if anything, being in Extended Studies does not mean we are incapable. It means we take our future seriously, and we are unafraid to seek the necessary aid to lead us through a successful university experience.”

Nokuthula was a TAI first year mentee in 2012 as well as a TAI mentor in 2015. As a mentee, she valued being part of a support system where guidance was readily available. In the light of this experience, Nokuthula aimed to create a similar environment for mentees in her mentoring group.

A Bachelor of Commerce graduate, Nokuthula was awarded a Golden Key International Society membership in 2013. She was further awarded the Ndedana Student Peer Mentoring Certificate of Participation in 2014, and the TAI Certificate in Peer Mentoring in 2015.

Nokuthula credits her friends and family for positively impacting her academic pursuits, together with facilitator of the TAI Commerce programme, Mr Amon Magadza.

SIKELELWA JO-AN QWAZI

Singer, songwriter and actress
CEO *La-Couples Holdings Company*

“Having a mentor when I was at Rhodes made it easier for me to approach people within my industry to mentor me, and I now have about three young people that I am mentoring.”



Singing her way to the top

SIKELELWA JO-AN QWAZI, KNOWN as Siki Jo-An, enrolled at Rhodes University to pursue music. With two distinctions in matric Siki did not understand why her only way into the institution was through the Extended Studies Programme, however she soon saw the benefits which it provided.

Hailing from the Kwa-Zakhele township in Port Elizabeth, 27-year-old Siki Jo-An came to Rhodes in 2012 with dreams of furthering her education in music. From a young age, Siki found herself to be a creative individual. Despite showing promise in many academic fields, the need to continue studying Drama and Music persisted. “My life was so balanced that I was one of the top achievers in my grade”, says Siki.

Siki set her sights on Rhodes University as it allowed her to study both subjects simultaneously: “When I auditioned to

study Music at Rhodes the process was much easier for me, as I already had a musical background academically.”

In the Extended Studies Programme, Siki was a TAI mentee in 2012. Her university experience was a smooth one, “My busy life from a young age helped me to be more confident in university. It was easy to make friends.”

The Trojan Academic Initiative (TAI) Student Peer Mentoring Programme helped her in this regard as well. “Having a mentor when I was at Rhodes made it easier for me to approach people within my industry to mentor me, and I now have about three young people that I am mentoring.”

Siki graduated from Rhodes University in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Drama and Instrumental Musical Studies. Since then she has been one of the top three vocalists of *The Voice South Africa* season three in 2019.

“I would recommend the TAI Extended Studies programme to incoming students at Rhodes, as this programme will prepare you to do better academically in your undergraduate period. You will have access to information that other students will not receive, because you will be under guidance”, shares Siki.

ZIYANDA NTANTISO

Personal Leadership Programme Officer for
the *Allan Gray Orbis Foundation*

“Mainstream students coming from [other] schools also need this support, as they are faced with so many challenges and could use a senior person who will give them guidance.”



Extending the impact of the TAI

ZIYANDA NTANTISO ATTENDED A high school which encouraged its learners to enter the Commerce industry. Ziyanda had no interest in anything of the sort. Rather, her father’s occupation as a trade union official inspired her to apply to Rhodes University’s Humanities Faculty, to study Industrial Sociology. In the Extended Humanities Programme, Ziyanda discovered a kind of academic guidance from her TAI mentor that she wishes all students outside the programme could also experience.

Hailing from East London in the Eastern Cape, Ziyanda chose Rhodes University owing to its location. By being close to home, Ziyanda had the comforts of family whilst experiencing the independence of university life.

With this freedom came challenges. “I faced the language barrier and a lack of confidence, particularly in the first year, as I came from a township school where everything was mainly taught in my home language. I could not participate

in tutorial sessions [at Rhodes] as I was ashamed of my poor English.”

The TAI Student Peer Mentoring Programme as well as the Extended Programme offered Ziyanda with space in which to overcome this challenge. By being a TAI mentee in 2009 and a mentor in 2010 and 2011, Ziyanda had regular opportunities to interact with people in English. “The programme also helped in terms of building networks and relationships outside the lecture hall,” says Ziyanda.

Ziyanda believes that programmes such as the TAI should be also be offered to students outside the realms of the Extended Programme. “Mainstream students coming from [other] schools also need this support, as they are faced with so many challenges and could use a senior person who will give them guidance.”

Today, Ziyanda works as a Personal Leadership Programme Officer for the *Allan Gray Orbis Foundation*. She assists students who have been funded by the Foundation, with academic and psychosocial matters. “This job requires mentorship skills as I meet with students on a quarterly basis to check on how they are doing, how far they are with their goals, and what challenges they are experiencing. TAI helped me a lot in preparing for this kind of job, as I still practise some of the skills learned there.”

SURPRISE MATHEBULA

Reading towards Master of Science degree

Surprise appreciated having extra time to become comfortable with resources that she was experiencing for the first time in the university context.



Bridging the gap

WHEN SURPRISE MATHEBULA WAS a young girl she was certain of two things - she wished to enter the science industry, and she hoped to be as independent as possible. Joining Rhodes University in 2013 provided Surprise with an opportunity to accomplish both.

Born and raised in Soweto, Johannesburg, Surprise faced a life with challenges. Her high school experience, while fun, was also difficult at times. "My experience in high school was filled with the challenges any public school in a township would face, for example a shortage of teachers, and overcrowding of students per class", says the 26-year-old.

Surprise's love of reading and her curiosity for the sciences resulted in her majoring in Ichthyology & Fisheries Science, as well as Entomology. She entered tertiary education

hopeful for the future, however she experienced some discrimination in the form of racism and classism: "I had to keep on pushing forward and reminding myself that I can only work on me, I can't control other people."

Her time as part of the Trojan Academic Initiative (TAI) Student Peer Mentoring Programme alleviated some of these pressures by providing a safe space with like-minded people. Surprise describes the programme as a "bridge for an easier transition to tertiary life".

Surprise also notes that as she completed her secondary education at a school which was not equipped with everything needed to fully explore the sciences, the Extended Studies Programme enabled her that exploration. Surprise appreciated having extra time to become comfortable with resources that she was experiencing for the first time in the university context.

Surprise graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 2016, followed by her Honours degree in 2017. She is currently working towards achieving her Masters in Science.