

enABLE

Issue 3, March 2023

WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT. WE ARE ALL THE SAME.

Dear Student,

The Disability Rights Unit (DRU) is committed to making reasonable adjustments and addressing any individual support requirements to make sure that you're able to participate fully and enjoy a fulfilling university experience.

At Wits, there are currently over 1000 students who have declared a disability. I encourage the Wits community to be observant of mobility challenges for people with disabilities by taking a photo of accessibility issues on our campuses and bringing it to the attention of the DRU. This will help the DRU to notify the departments responsible for infrastructure and maintenance.

If you are an existing student with the DRU and have previously applied for concessions for tests and exams, then please remember to contact **Mx Tish Geddes** at Tish.White@wits.ac.za for 2023 concession renewals.

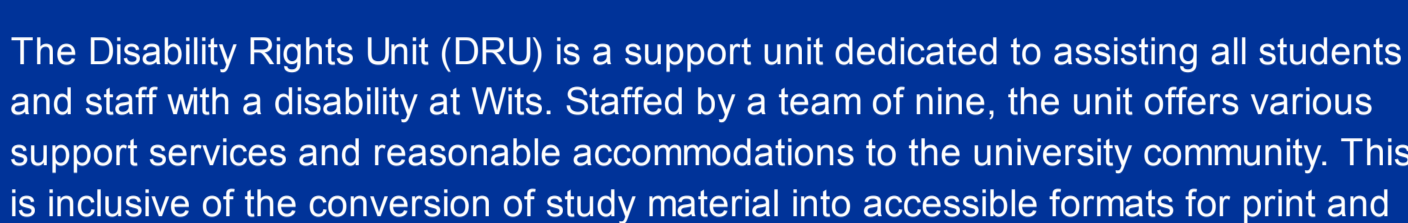
For information regarding students with disabilities who wish to apply for concessions for tests and exams, please see the following link: <https://www.wits.ac.za/disability-rights-unit/extra-time-and-other-concessions/>

Wishing you well with your studies for 2023, and if you need more info on the DRU, please [visit our website](#).

All the best!

Duncan Yates

Neurodiversity and Mental Health Coordinator



The Disability Rights Unit (DRU) is a support unit dedicated to assisting all students and staff with a disability at Wits. Staffed by a team of nine, the unit offers various support services and reasonable accommodations to the university community. This is inclusive of the conversion of study material into accessible formats for print and visually-impaired students, South African Sign Language (SASL) interpretation and real-time captioning for Deaf and hearing-impaired students, assistive technologies and devices, computer centres on two campuses with dedicated accessibility software, IT and mobility training, and screening and guidance on adaptations for specific learning disabilities. The unit is also available to those who wish to apply for extra time and accessible parking bays.

Our offices are located on the 1st Floor, East Wing, Solomon Mahlangu House Building, East Campus. Contact: Mx Tish Geddes at Tish.White@wits.ac.za

Our satellite office is on the 1st Floor, Administration Block, School of Education Campus. Contact: Ms Kobela Petja at kobela.petja@wits.ac.za

For more information on DRU and the various services offered, please visit: <https://www.wits.ac.za/disability-rights-unit/>

@DRU TEAM

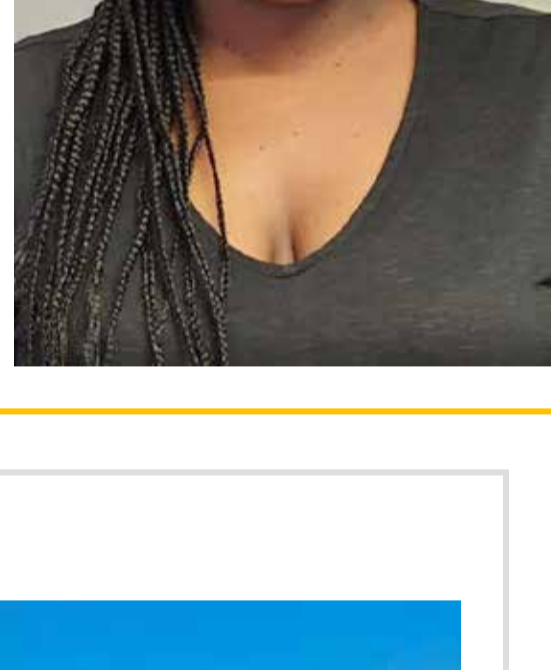


The Back (from left to right): Subhashini Elan, Kobela Petja, Duncan Yates, Dr Anlia Pretorius, Khetha Makoatsane, Tish Geddes, and Andrew Sam

Front: Alfred Tou

New Staff Member joins DRU:

The DRU welcomed a new staff member, Mrs Nomsa Mathebula, to the department. Nomsa joins DRU from DeafSA and will take up the role of Accessible Study Content Provider. She will assist visually impaired and Deaf students, ensuring their course content is accessible.



@SOCIAL MEDIA



In considering universal access principles, one platform that is frequently forgotten is social media. Since 2011, Wits Disability Rights Unit has been reaching students, staff and prospective students through to Meta platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. The aim is to offer popular content in accessible formats and promote internal content consistently through the use of trigger warnings, access notes for videos that have subtitles, image descriptions, audio transcripts and linking to original screen reader accessible content.

If you're curious about how to create and share accessible content or want to show your support, please follow us:

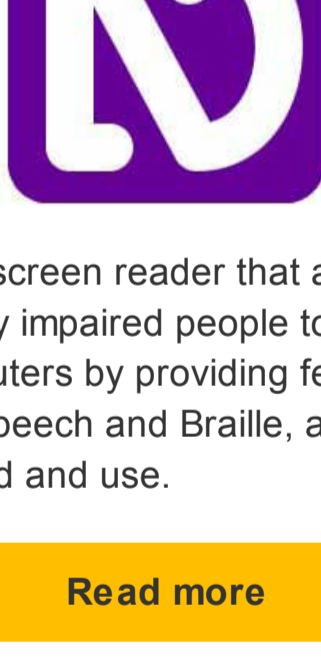
Facebook – www.facebook.com/dru

Instagram – www.instagram.com/dru

@TECHNOLOGY

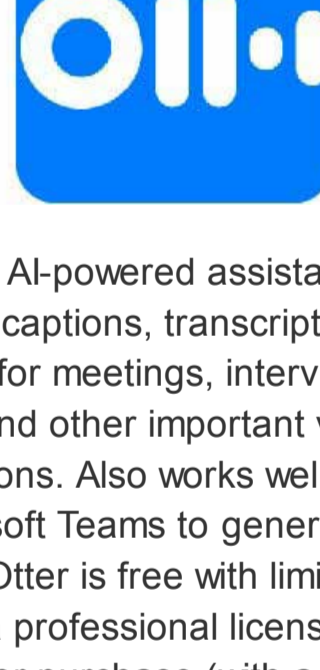


The DRU utilises assistive technology to help students with disabilities learn more effectively, and ranges in sophistication from "low" technologies such as a graphic organizer worksheet, to "high" technologies including cutting-edge hardware, software and smartphone apps. Below you will find some recommendations for useful technologies that can help in your studies.



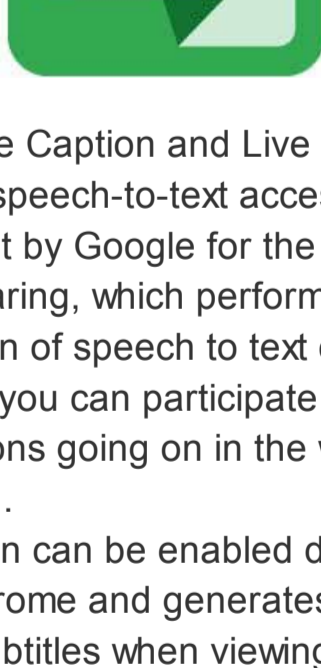
NVDA is a screen reader that allows blind and visually impaired people to access their computers by providing feedback via synthetic speech and Braille, and is free to download and use.

[Read more](#)



Otter is an AI-powered assistant which generates captions, transcriptions and rich notes for meetings, interviews, lectures, and other important voice conversations. Also works well with Zoom and Microsoft Teams to generate live captions. Otter is free with limited features, for purchase (with a discount for staff and students from educational institutions). For more information, please visit the following link:

[Read more](#)

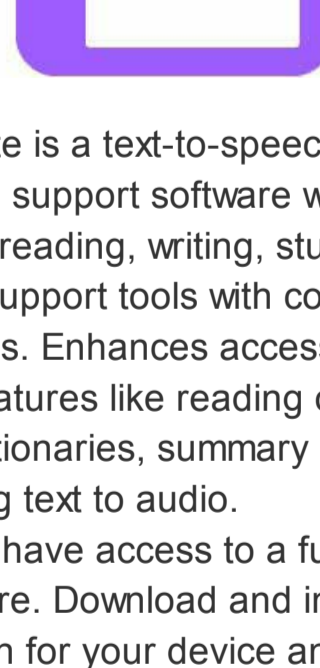


Google Live Caption and Live Transcribe are a new speech-to-text accessibility service built by Google for the deaf and hard of hearing, which performs real-time transcription of speech to text on your screen, so you can participate in conversations going on in the world around you.

Live Caption can be enabled directly from Google Chrome and generates the captions/subtitles when viewing media such as online lectures. To enable Live Captions, please refer to the following [link](#).

Similarly, there is the Live Transcribe app for Android users which provides captions/subtitles on your smartphone or smart device.

[Read more](#)



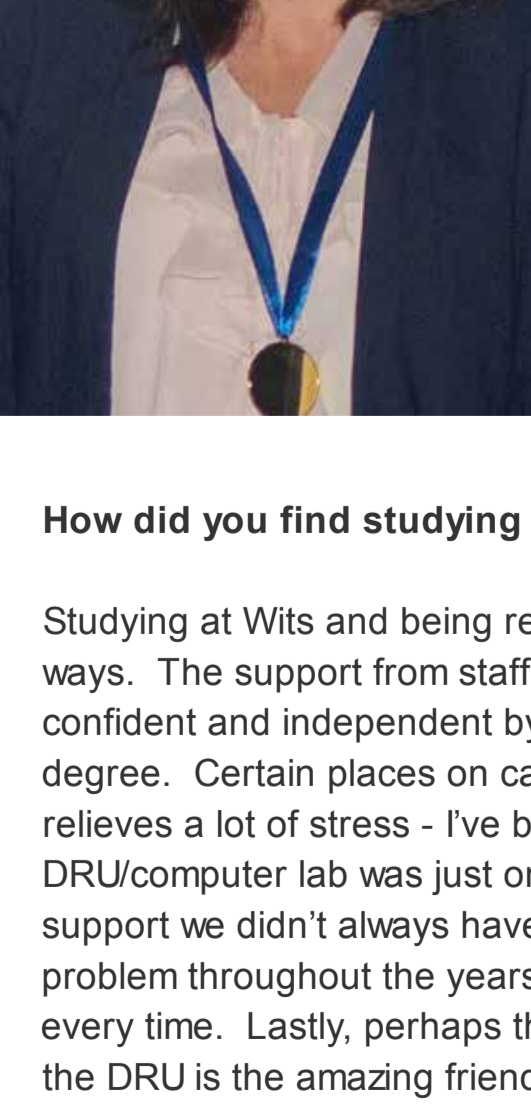
Read&Write is a text-to-speech, literacy and writing support software which integrates reading, writing, studying, and research support tools with common applications. Enhances accessibility by offering features like reading out loud, built-in dictionaries, summary highlighters, and turning text to audio.

All Witsies have access to a full license of this software. Download and install the trial version for your device and then log in with a Microsoft account using your Wits credentials, Username: Wits email address and Password: Wits ICT password.

[Read more](#)

GRADUATE FEATURE:

DON'T DIS MY ABILITY: Alexandra Makhlof



Tell us about yourself. Where are you from and what did you study?

I'm from Johannesburg. I recently completed an MA in Fine Arts and I'm currently studying psychology honours part-time.

Could you share with us some challenges you have overcome with your specific disability?

Whilst studying Fine Arts, I had to navigate a very visual modality with 2-5% vision. This was especially challenging because my vision dropped precipitously only two years before I began the MA so I had to learn to navigate the academic world, art-making and my social environment in a drastically different way. It took a long time to learn how to be in these spaces and these are things I will continue to grapple with. I'm thankful that a lot of this learning 'to be' has taken place in the university environment which provides a lot of support.

How did you find studying at Wits and being a student registered with the DRU?

Studying at Wits and being registered with the DRU have helped me to grow in many ways. The support from staff and students at the DRU has enabled me to become more confident and independent by giving me the technical and emotional tools to complete my degree. Certain places on campus can be difficult to access so having a place to go relieves a lot of stress - I've been on campus for long enough to remember when the DRU/computer lab was just one small room so although there has always been staff support we didn't always have the facilities we needed. If I've ever had any sort of problem throughout the years the staff at the DRU go above and beyond to help me, every time. Lastly, perhaps the best thing about studying at Wits and being registered at the DRU is the amazing friends I've made!

What advice would you give current students with disabilities studying at Wits?

The advice I would give to current students with disabilities at Wits is: you have as much of a right to be on campus as anyone else, so don't be afraid to take up space and also to change space, especially in terms of accessibility. The chances are that you will be improving things for other staff and students that come after you as well as for yourself. There are more people that want to help you to succeed than people that don't so take every opportunity to explore, grow and connect.

What is your favourite quote?

There are many quotes that resonate with me, today I came across this thought from Alain de Botton: "The difference between hope and despair is a different way of telling stories from the same facts."