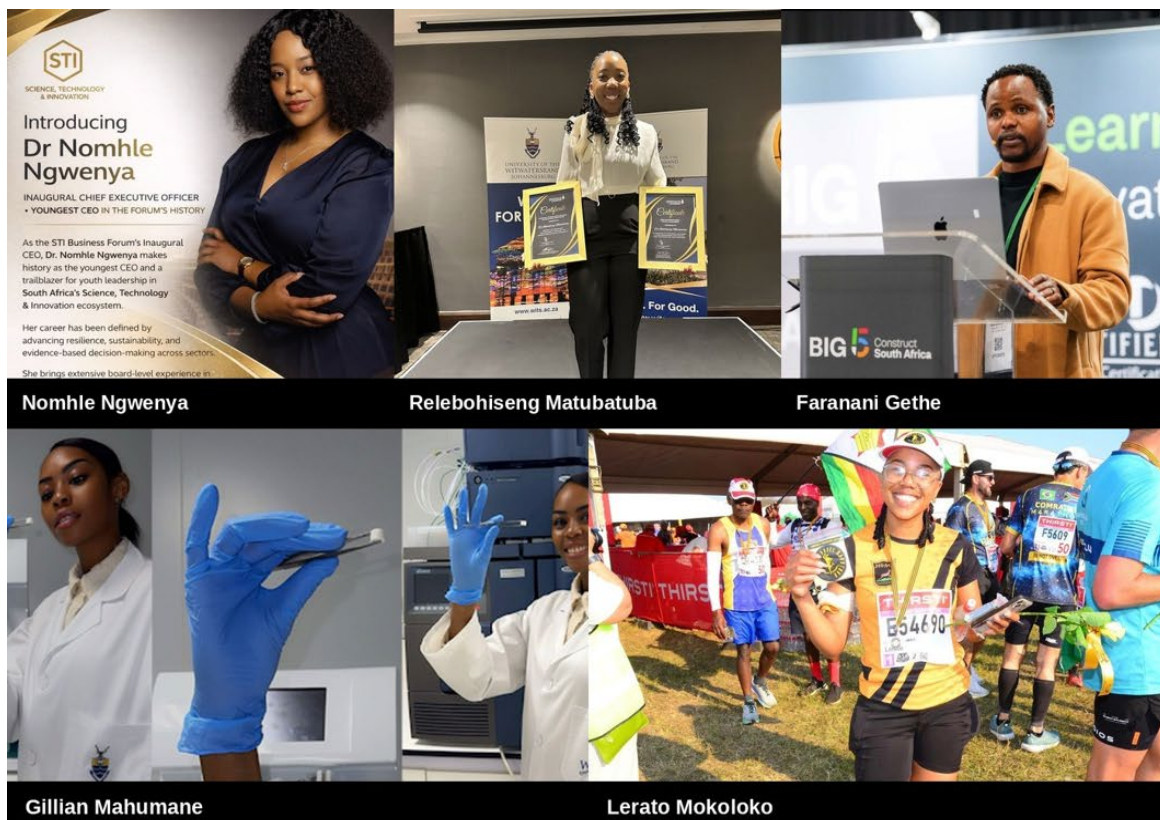




Nomhle Ngwenya

Relebohiseng Matubatuba

Faranani Gethe

Gillian Mahumane

Lerato Mokoloko

CDTA | AUGUST 2026

THE WORK THAT MATTERS

Scholars, belonging and
the discipline of attention

Carnegie Diversifying the Academy Programme

University of the Witwatersrand

INSIDE | Grantee impact • Academic priorities • The long race

FROM THE PROGRAMME OFFICE

An academy worth belonging to

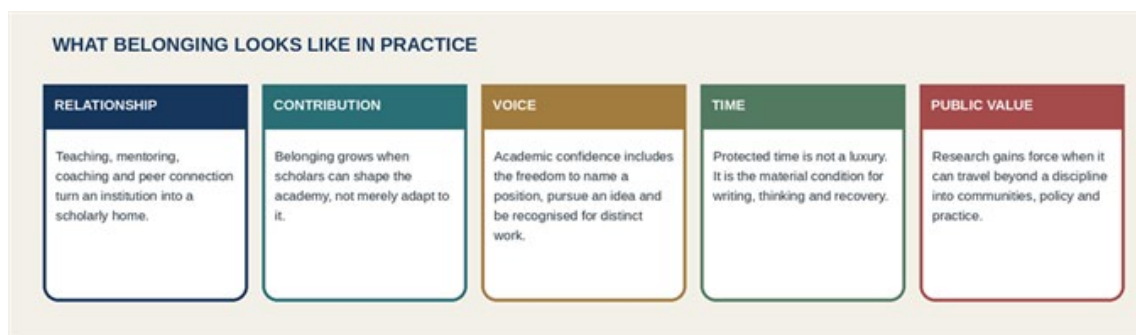
CDTA is a grant programme, but its deeper work is to create the conditions in which scholars can

contribute, grow and be recognised.

Belonging in academia does not rise neatly with rank, polish or technical confidence. It can remain unsettled after promotion, weaken when professional identities shift, and strengthen through teaching, supervision, mentoring and the practical experience of being useful to others. The academy becomes habitable when scholars are not treated as visitors to an inherited institution, but as people with the authority to reshape it.

That insight sits at the centre of the Carnegie Diversifying the Academy programme. CDTA supports Black African and Coloured scholars through funding, coaching, mentoring, peer connection and protected space for professional and personal growth. Its purpose is not simply to improve individual performance but to widen who produces knowledge, who leads academic communities, whose questions are treated as consequential, and how scholarship travels into society.

In a recent engagement with the 2026 cohort they pointed to a connected developmental agenda. Grant writing remains a gatekeeper capability and collaboration, public communication, scholarly voice and visibility require deliberate cultivation. Time is the scarce resource running through all of them. A scholar may know what matters and still struggle to protect it from the daily machinery of teaching, administration, service and urgent requests. This edition therefore profiles grantees whose work is already moving beyond the university, and then turns to the discipline of deciding what deserves attention.



THE CDTA PROPOSITION

Academic development is strongest when material support, intellectual ambition and human belonging reinforce one another. Funding creates room and coaching clarifies direction. Networks make contribution visible, and the scholar still does the work, but no longer has to do all of it alone.

GRANTEES IN PUBLIC LIFE

Scholarship that leaves the building

INSTITUTION-BUILDER

Dr Nomhle Ngwenya

Nomhle Ngwenya works at the point where climate science, institutional imagination and youth opportunity meet. Trained in Geography and Environmental Sciences, she completed her doctorate at 25 and became, at the time, the youngest science PhD graduate at Wits. Her trajectory has since moved beyond the familiar boundaries of an academic career into science leadership, climate risk, resilience, sustainability and evidence-led public debate.

As inaugural chief executive of the Science, Technology and



Innovation Business Forum, she has argued for an applied science and innovation university that connects STEM education to the economic geography of Ekurhuleni. The idea is larger than a new campus; it treats higher education as public infrastructure capable of bringing technical education, entrepreneurship and meaningful work closer to communities that have historically had to travel elsewhere for opportunity.

Her contribution to CDTA is a model of scholarly agency. Research becomes more consequential when a scholar can carry evidence into institution-building, policy argument and new platforms for young people to enter science.



MARKETING FOR PUBLIC GOOD

Dr Relebohiseng (Lebo) Matubatuba

Lebo Matubatuba shows what happens when marketing is treated not as persuasion for its own sake, but as a discipline for understanding prosocial behaviour. Her research examines blood donation, donor commitment and the use of data and technology to build durable relationships with existing donors. The social problem is immediate: blood systems need reliable participation, not occasional awareness. She holds a New Appointment Grant as well as Enabling Grant award with us.

In June, the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management recognised both sides of her academic practice. She received an early- or mid-career teaching excellence award for redesigning a third-year digital marketing curriculum, and a research-driven media impact award for scholarship that reached wider publics. The combination matters, as it exemplifies a refusal of the false choice between serious research, excellent teaching and public communication.

Within CDTA, her work represents scholarship with a civic pulse. It asks how disciplinary knowledge can change behaviour, strengthen public systems and remain legible beyond the journal article.

GRANTEES CHANGING SYSTEMS

Designing futures people can live in



CITIES WITHOUT ERASURE

Faranani Gethe

Faranani Gethe studies a problem visible across Johannesburg and many other cities. Urban regeneration can repair buildings, attract investment and improve public space, while also displacing the people and enterprises that sustained an area before capital arrived. His research asks how renewal can improve a city without converting inclusion into an afterthought.

A lecturer and PhD researcher in the School of Construction Economics and Management, his work spans urban regeneration, real estate, infrastructure development, urban economics and sustainable cities. At Big 5 Construct South Africa, he brought this research into a professional arena where developers, planners, public authorities and built-environment practitioners make decisions with material consequences.

His CDTA contribution is the insistence that the built environment is not merely technical, but it is social policy made concrete. Better cities require evidence, finance, design and a theory of who is entitled to remain.



REPAIR AS A RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Dr Gillian Mahumane

Gillian Mahumane has built a scientific career around the conditions of recovery. A traumatic brain injury in her family gave her an early, lived understanding of how injury can alter function, personality and personhood. Neural tissue engineering later provided the scientific language through which those questions could become a research programme.

At the Wits Advanced Drug Delivery Platform, she combines pharmaceuticals, biomaterials and translational reasoning. Her doctoral work developed nano-reinforced three-dimensional scaffolds for neural tissue engineering, including delivery strategies that could reduce oxidative stress and support cellular repair. Her research now also extends into antimicrobial technologies and women's health. Read more about this [here](#).

From June to August 2026, she is undertaking a Population Council Research Fellowship at the Centre for Biomedical Research (Variano Lab), Rockefeller University, in New York to develop a drug-eluting device for heavy menstrual bleeding. The fellowship places African biomedical innovation in a global research environment while keeping the work anchored in a health problem with direct consequences for women's lives.

Having already been awarded the Emerging Researchers award for the Faculty of Health Sciences and a feature in Wits University's TechWomen@ Wits, a publication that honours women leaders at Wits University, Gillian represents the CDTA ideal of a scholar who is locally grounded, globally connected and committed to building scientific ecosystems rather than isolated outputs.

MILESTONES AND ACADEMIC LINEAGE

Two doctorates, and the network behind them

Graduation is an individual achievement with a collective architecture.

On 13 July, two CDTA recipients from the School of Business Sciences graduated with doctorates. Their theses address different institutional questions, but both translate complex organisational phenomena into evidence that can improve practice. This is the kind of impactful research CDTA is proud to support.



Dr Aretha Mazingi

Human resource analytics adoption, HR management practices and the operational performance of HR professionals in the South African financial sector.

Her work examines the difficult step between having data and building an organisation capable of using it. In a sector where workforce decisions carry operational, ethical and transformation consequences, HR analytics becomes a question of institutional capability rather than software alone.

CDTA Head of Academic Support and Coaching, Prof Antonia Wadley, accompanied her through the final stretch of the journey as her coach.



Dr Aaron Koopman

Examining the dimensions and outcomes of university brand personality.

His doctoral research treats a university not only as an institution with a logo, but as an organisation that acquires a recognisable character in the minds of students and stakeholders. That personality shapes trust, attachment and institutional outcomes. He now teaches marketing and coordinates the BCom Honours programme in Marketing.

He was supervised by Prof Neo Ligaraba, a CDTA alumni and one of CLM's five most productive researchers recognised in 2026.



From recipient to supervisor, coach and colleague

The graduation photographs also capture a wider programme story. Prof Neo Ligaraba and Dr Thembekile Mayayise are previous CDTA recipients who now occupy established academic roles in the School of Business Sciences. Neo's research productivity and supervision, and Thembekile's work in digital transformation and cybersecurity, show how investment in one career can become capacity for many others.

This is how diversification compounds. A grant supports a scholar. The scholar publishes, teaches, supervises, communicates and opens doors. The programme's real unit of impact is therefore not only the awardee, but the academic lineage that follows.

What the network makes possible

CONTINUITY

Earlier grantees become supervisors, mentors and collaborators. Their experience helps the next scholar enter the academy with more guidance and fewer invisible rules.

INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

Knowledge of promotion pathways, funding systems, research cultures and academic leadership remains within the programme and can be shared across cohorts.

MULTIPLICATION

A strengthened academic career expands supervision, teaching, publications, partnerships and public contribution. The benefit travels through people and institutions.

THE PROGRAMME EFFECT

CDTA does more than reduce the cost of an individual research journey. It builds a network in which achievement becomes shared capacity, and in which belonging can be inherited through relationships rather than repeatedly won from scratch.

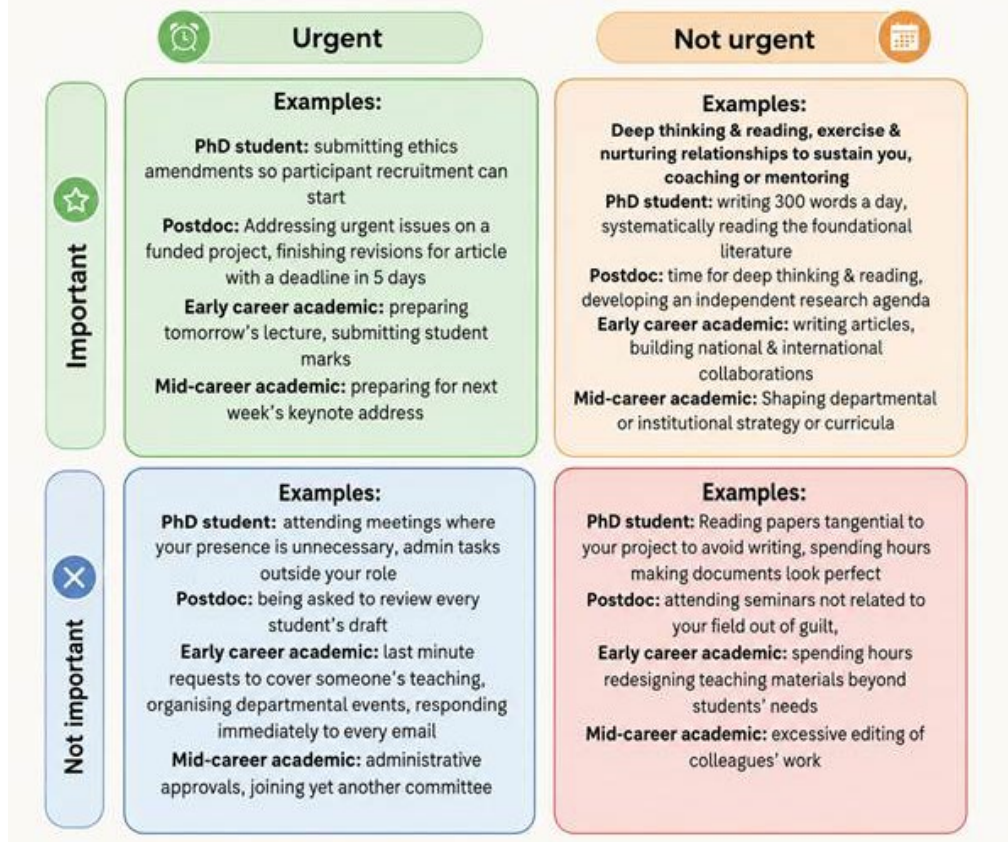
MAIN FEATURE

Navigating competing priorities in academia using the Eisenhower matrix

In the group PhD session last month, we discussed the challenges of navigating PhD studies whilst simultaneously having an academic job. We explored productivity using the Eisenhower Matrix. The matrix, named after President Eisenhower, was created by Stephen Covey in 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' (1989) and is a simple framework for categorising tasks according to their importance and urgency. As Stephen Covey said, "*The most important work is rarely the most urgent work.*" This framework supports prioritising work that has the greatest impact on your career and can be used at any point in the academic journey. In this article, I describe how.

This figure shows some academic examples of work categorised by importance and urgency:

The Eisenhower Matrix for academic work



Quadrants 1 & 2 – Important-Urgent vs Important-Not-Urgent

Where our impact lies

The impactful work we typically want to do as academics, like paper writing, mapping our career trajectory, and looking after our well-being, whilst important to us, isn't urgent (Quadrant 2 - Important-Not Urgent) and so often gets relegated to evenings, weekends...or never. Joshua Becker, a writer on minimalism, describes the urgent screaming at us, whilst the important gently whispers. Guess where our attention typically goes! I'm not going to spend a moment more describing the Important-Urgent (Quadrant 1), we all know it well, other than to say, get on with this now. The invitation for our Important-Not Urgent work, however, is to schedule and protect it. This is the work that will have impact years from now. Impact on our health, relationships and quality of life, as well as our careers.



Quadrant 3 - Not Important-Urgent work

If you look at the examples in quadrant 3, the Not Important-Urgent work, these are basically *other people's priorities*. You can imagine how helpful, conscientious people can get stuck here. Everyone loves a 'team player', right?

The invitation for this quadrant is to delegate, negotiate or minimise the work as much as possible. Richard Feynman, the winner of the Nobel prize for Physics had another strategy. He joked "*I have invented another myth for myself: that I'm irresponsible. I'm actively irresponsible. I tell everyone I don't do anything. If anyone asks me to be on a committee for admissions... 'no', I tell them: I'm irresponsible.*" Richard Feynman was a well-established academic by this time. In our PhD group discussion, we agreed that delegating as a strategy (or completely avoiding like Feynman!) isn't realistic as a student and/or early-career academic, and that minimising is a better strategy. For example, joining a committee (necessary for career development and maybe a probation report) but not joining multiple committees.

Quadrant 4 – Not Important-Not urgent work

Social media scrolling came up for most of us as a regular Not important-Not urgent activity, and several people committed to doing away with this activity either partly or completely. Activities in this quadrant can also look very like productivity (see examples in the first figure), which can be trickier to spot.

An invitation

"The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities." Stephen Covey

The invitation of this framework is to make time for the meaningful Important-Not urgent work that will make the most impact on your life. I use 'make' time intentionally because 'finding' time, like stumbling across it in a drawer, we all know, doesn't happen.

The practical invitation is to:

1. Identify the work that will still matter in three+ years
2. Open your diary and give that work dates and a duration
3. Then defend those appointments with the seriousness usually reserved for everyone else's urgency.

So, in service of the work that is most important to you, what will you diarise today?

If you'd like some Important-Not urgent time getting clear on what is truly meaningful for you, feel free to Toni an email to book some coaching time: antonia.wadley@wits.ac.za

The coaching available through the grant isn't about becoming more productive or meeting more targets. It's protected space and time to reflect on what matters most, so that your work, and your life, are

guided by intention rather than urgency.

CLOSING STORY

The long race

A postdoctoral fellow returns from injury, improves her Comrades time and reminds us that progress is built through repetition.



Dr Lerato Mokoloko

Lerato is a CDTA postdoctoral fellow in the School of Chemistry. Her research focuses on functional carbon nanomaterials, their synthesis, advanced characterization and optimization for application in clean and sustainable energy production. Her publications examine how the properties of carbon nanostructures can be transformed and leveraged for catalysis in energy production, while also highlighting their applications in sensing and optoelectronic technologies

Beyond the laboratory, Lerato is an accomplished distance runner. Her experience of completing the 2026 Comrades Marathon is best understood through her own account:

“I ran my third Comrades Marathon on 14 June 2026 after taking a one-year break due to an injury I picked up in 2024. It felt incredible to return to my favourite race and stand on the start line alongside thousands of runners from around the world, all brave enough to take on the legendary Comrades Marathon.

RACE NOTE

9:21:45

**Personal best in the 2026
Comrades Up Run**

3rd

**Completed Comrades
Marathon**

30 min

**Improvement on her previous
Up Run**

The 2026 race was the 99th edition and covered 85.777 km from Durban to Pietermaritzburg. [20]

"I was thrilled to cross the finish line once again, this time in 9:21:45, a personal best and an improvement of 30 minutes on my previous Comrades Up Run.

"My running journey started in primary school, where I participated in athletics and soccer. Fast forward to 2022, I joined a running club and met runners who were training for Comrades. Their passion inspired me, and I knew I wanted to be part of it.

"Running Comrades had been a dream of mine since I was a teenager, and now I was surrounded by experienced runners who had completed the race multiple times and were eager to share their knowledge of the Ultimate Human Race.

"Running is important to me because it constantly pushes me to grow. Training for the Comrades Marathon demands consistency, discipline, and the determination to show up even when you don't feel like it. These lessons extend far beyond running and have helped me in both my career and personal development."

Lerato's story is compelling because it is not built around uninterrupted momentum. It is about returning after injury, rebuilding patiently and trusting the work completed before race day. Her achievement captures the discipline shared by endurance running and scientific research. Both demand sustained preparation, tolerance for difficulty and the ability to continue when results are not immediate.

Her personal best of 9 hours, 21 minutes and 45 seconds therefore represents more than an improved race time. It reflects recovery, consistency and the courage to return to a demanding goal after interruption. These qualities are equally present in her work as a scientist and CDTA fellow.

THE LINK

A diversified academy is built over distance. It requires ambition, material support, recovery, disciplined attention and people who keep making room for one another. The work that matters is rarely completed in one heroic effort. It advances through the next deliberate step.