



ISSUE 6 – OCTOBER 2025

WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT. **WE ARE ALL THE SAME.**

WELCOME FROM OUR HEAD OF THE DISABILITY RIGHTS UNIT

Dear Students,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the **enABLE** Newsletter – a space created especially for students with disabilities at WITS.

This platform is designed to keep you informed, supported, and connected with the services, opportunities, and community available to you through the Disability Rights Unit.

At WITS, we are deeply committed to creating an inclusive academic and social environment where every student can thrive. Through the DRU, we aim to break down barriers, celebrate diversity, and ensure that you have the tools and resources needed to succeed.

This episode of the **enABLE** Newsletter will bring you updates on accessibility initiatives, important academic and wellness information, student achievements, and ways to engage with your peers.

Most importantly, it will highlight that you are not alone on this journey – you are part of a vibrant community where your voice matters. I encourage you to make the most of the opportunities shared here, to reach out when you need support, and to share your stories with us so that we can continue building a more inclusive WITS together.

Dr Leila Abdool Gafoor



Dr Leila Abdool Gafoor

GREETINGS FROM THE DRU STAFF



Welcome Tea for Arlene and Bongani – 1st July 2025

Left to right: **Nicoleen Potgieter** - Deputy Registrar; **Londiwe Mngoma** - Senior Administrative Assistant; **Dr Leila Abdool Gafoor** – Head of DRU; **Khetha Mbatha** – Sign Language Interpreter; **Arlene Damons** - Academic Concessions and Therapy Coordinator; **Bongani Sithole** – Accessible Study Content Provider; **Andrew Sam** – Adaptive Technologist. Front: **Alfred Tlou** – Tests and Exams Officer.



Transformation committee event – 10th September 2025

Left to right: **Kobela Petja**– Print Impaired Access Coordinator; **Bongani Sithole** - Accessible Study Content Provider; **Dr Leila Abdool Gafoor** - Head of DRU; **Londiwe Mngoma** - Senior Administrative Assistant; **Andrew Sam** - Adaptive Technologist; **Arlene Damons** - Academic Concessions and Therapy Coordinator; **Subhashini Ellan** – Academic and Facilities Access Coordinator.

HELLO TO THE NEW MEMBERS OF THE DRU

Welcome to Arlene and Bongani! We look forward to what you add to the DRU team and to the lives of our students!

Welcome Arlene Damons, our new Academic Concessions and Therapy Coordinator.

It is an honour to join the WITS University community as a staff member, having graduated from Wits 30 years ago! My background as an Occupational Therapist was predominantly in physical rehabilitation, working with people with a variety of physical disabilities. More recently, I worked in the high school at an LSEN school for Learners with Special Educational Needs where many learners had conditions of Neurodiversity. I am pleased to be part of the DRU team, striving together to assist students to navigate life at WITS, moving beyond challenges that any type of disability or condition may bring, to reach one's best potential, and move towards a most successful future. #WitsieForLife.



Welcome Bongani Sithole, our new Accessible Study Content Provider.



I consider myself a dedicated professional with extensive experience supporting individuals with disabilities, particularly the Deaf community. Skilled in South African Sign Language with over 10 years' experience, as an interpreter, I believe courage is the best asset anyone can strive for. I strive to excel personally and professionally, leveraging courage to overcome challenges and deliver exceptional service. The experience I have gained, will assist in my new role as an Accessible Study Content Provider within the Higher Education environment. Also gaining experience in other learning disabilities and the impact that I can make in each students' academic life here at WITS.

Khetha Mbatha, our outgoing Sign Language Interpreter.

As I take my leave after almost seven years, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for the time we have shared together in the DRU and the wonderful memories. It has been a privilege to work alongside such dedicated and passionate people. I know you will continue to do the wonderful work that makes such a difference - always keeping students, especially those with disabilities, at the centre of everything you do. That is the true purpose of the work, and I have no doubt you will carry it forward with excellence. Thank you for the support, kindness, and memories that we have created together.



We wish you well for your future endeavours Khetha! Thank you for your years of vibrant and joyful input into the lives of students, the DRU and WITS.

Sipho McAni, our DRU SRC Representative.



As my term is about to end, I would like to appreciate each one of you. The road to creating an accessible environment on campus for students is so important. The developments that WITS DRU provide for disability-specific resources and assistive technologies is impressive. Launching a Stationary Drive for students with disabilities who write at the DRU examination venue, was a big milestone. I would like to thank my SRC team, the university committees that I sat on, and especially my subcommittee member, Simphiwe Mtshali, who enabled me to yield such positive results. Special thanks are extended to Dr. Leila Abdool Gafoor for her expertise and dedication to the DRU, and to the other DRU officials.

Thank you Sipho, for your contribution to the DRU. We wish you the best for your future!

Holly Heinzelmann:

I started my journey at WITS in 2020 studying a BSc majoring in Genetics and Developmental Biology, and Ecology and Conservation. I completed my degree in 2022 and began my Post-Graduate LLB in 2023. I am due to complete my LLB at the end of this year. In January 2026, I start my articles at Webber Wentzel in Sandton, transitioning from education to the practical legal field.

I can say without a doubt that none of this would have been possible without the assistance of the DRU at WITS. The team works tirelessly to ensure accessibility. When the conditional acceptance letter arrived for my BSc, I was ecstatic! However, when I realised that going to WITS meant leaving my school - a place where I had spent 13 years of my life - a place that I was so familiar with - a place where I had thrived as a disabled student, I became nervous. WITS was so much bigger; it was strange and less kind. I did not know how I was going to cope physically - let alone deal with the workload.

Times of transition have always been incredibly anxiety-provoking for me. I think this is true for most students who have disabilities. We rely on routine to navigate life's challenges. For this reason, I have always operated on the assumption that the more knowledge I have about a situation, the better I can approach it. Therefore, I did some research and met with the WITS Disability Rights Unit. We came up with a plan, for me to switch from using my walker, to making use of their mobility scooter, while I was on campus. It worked! And I graduated with 4 distinctions and multiple certificates of merit.



The transition from BSc to LLB was also scary for the same reasons: another unknown environment, new faculty administrators who did not know me or what my needs were, and a whole new way of thinking. Once again, with the support of the DRU, I navigated these challenges and was also awarded two subject prizes.

As I am nearing the end of my student journey, I can say that WITS University is one of the most accessible places that I have experienced. I am independent! There have been challenges along the way, but I am so thankful for the constant support from the DRU to navigate and overcome them.

As I approach the next transition in my life, I feel that ever-familiar anxiety, that I experienced when I left school, when I started my BSc, and then my LLB. I am heading for the corporate world now. Again, I have committed to my 'knowledge is power' position, and organised meetings in advance at my place of work, to navigate the changes ahead.

I think this testifies as to how difficult navigating life with a disability can be. However, if my track record is anything to go by, I believe that I will adapt and thrive in the environment that I am moving to.

I think, it is true that for most people with disabilities, that we must fight more than others, and that can be exhausting. However, it is also true, that we are resilient and resourceful. Our disabilities and life-experiences make us innovative, tenacious, and empathetic. These are some of our greatest strengths.



Thank you, Holly, for sharing some of your vulnerable and victorious stories with us. We agree that your track record speaks for itself, and that you will thrive. All the best! We look forward to hearing more from you in future.

Kabelo Kekana:



The DRU advocated for my rights as a student and empowered me to self-advocate, so that I can speak for myself. This has also given me skills to speak up for other people with disabilities in the future. I am a first year LLB student at WITS and my academic success is supported by the DRU team.

The DRU ensures that my study material is fully accessible to me as a blind student. They also do this for students with other kinds of disabilities as well. They gave me lessons on software operations. They are a significant bridge between students with disabilities and their lecturers or other staff members in the WITS community.

To give you an example, when I walk by myself within the WITS premises, I hear other students exclaim “wow” as I pass by. The students are alarmed by my independence and confidence to walk alone. I imagine that there are others who are looking at me from a distance. This portrays the DRU's efforts in helping students like me to be independent.

The DRU is not only recognised here at WITS, but also by people from outside communities.

I want people to understand that disability is not a barrier, nor is it a limitation to one's potential, but it is simply an alternative way of doing things. One question I am frequently asked by other students is how I study? I make use of a screen reader which reads the screen contents to me. This gives me an advantage to study when there are no lights as I am not dependant on my eyes. The DRU keeps us students with disabilities thriving. They help us to turn minor setbacks into major accomplishments.

Sometimes I look at my academic independence and say to myself, the DRU stands for Definition of Real Upliftment!



Thank you for sharing, Kabelo. Your story is an inspiration of 'simply doing things in an alternative way.'

We love your personal definition of the DRU, 'Definition of Real Upliftment.'

CELEBRATIONS

September was Deaf Awareness Month!

Check out the posts on our WITS Disability Rights Unit Facebook page:

Learn how to sign the South African National Anthem!

Facebook on the 3rd of September 2025:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1733FuAdPA>

And experience SASL, our 12th proudly South African language in action, with one of our Deaf lecturer's as well and two of our students.

Coming up: National Disability Rights Awareness month



South Africa's annual **National Disability Rights Awareness month** is from the 3rd of November to 3rd of December every year.

The **3rd of December** is also the **National Disability Rights Awareness Day!**

how we can celebrate this day in the link or QR code below!

ACCESS-ABILITY - accessibility focus:

In this issue, considering September was Deaf Awareness month, let us consider accessibility for those who are Deaf or deaf.

Do you know the difference between those who are Deaf or deaf?



The WITS DRU supports students who are Deaf or deaf, making the curriculum accessible by means of our Accessible Content Providers, who are specialist interpreters who use South African Sign Language (SASL) both in person as well as online.

Adaptive technology options that are available for students who are Deaf or deaf include making use of Microsoft Live captions or Google Live Captions, as well as Live Transcribe, which automatically transcribe speech to text, in real time.

Microsoft Live captions work on any app in Windows, including TEAMS. It transcribes videos, as well as audio from your microphone to caption in-person conversations. It can also translate audio into many other languages.



Google Live Caption is available on Android devices, where it captions speech from videos and calls including live streams, on a Google Chrome browser.



GRADUATIONS

Congratulations to these students from the DRU, who graduated this year!

- Thando Mkhize
- Kutlwano Sifora
- Lisa Msiza
- Clifford Machete
- Alexandra Makhlouf

See the WITS Disability Rights Unit Facebook page:

<https://facebook.com/share/19pgzDCyC2>

Your hard work has paid off! We wish you the Best for your future! (If we missed anyone, let us know)

EXAMS AND CONCESSIONS:

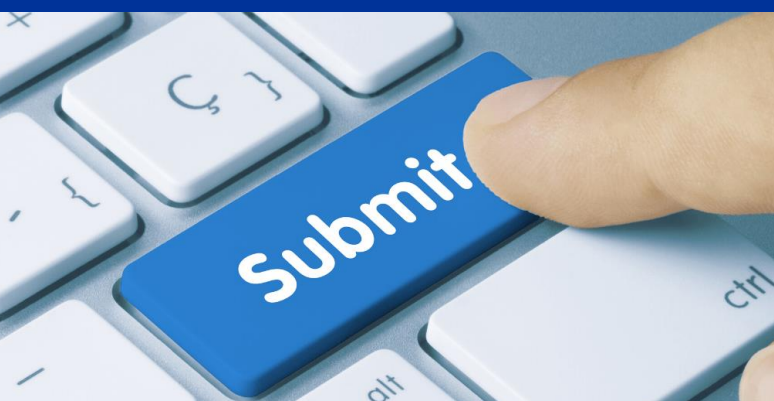
It is that time again!

Before you know it, you will be writing your final exams for the year!

Some of you will be writing your final set of exams, as you approach the end of your degree!

We wish each one of you all the best for your upcoming exams! Every effort you put in, is worth it, for the success that you will achieve!

Students who have concessions:



NB - remember to submit your exam timetable to the EGO or the DRU 2 weeks in advance via these links:

EGO: To register for the EGO extra time venue: <https://witsapps.wits.ac.za/wstudent/p/egoextratimeform>

DRU: To register for the DRU extra time venue, send your request with exam timetable to Alfred.tlou@wits.ac.za.

Study Techniques:

CCDU has amazing resources on their website. Be sure to check them out! And apply them!

CCDU: STUDY TECHNIQUES link

We wish each one of you the best for your upcoming exams!

Every amount of effort that you put in, will be worth it, for the results that you will achieve!

STUDENT SUPPORT SESSIONS



Join us for informal discussions at the DRU, 13:15 – 13:45 on these Wednesdays:

22nd October: 'Brain-gym – session. Boost your brain – body connection to optimise your studying.

29th October: Neurodiversity and approaching exams. What to consider?

5th November: Exams – are you ready? Tips and strategies.

It is also an opportunity for us to get together, to chat, learn something new and to support one another.

For more info:

<mailto:arlene.damons@wits.ac.za>

DRU STAFF - hard work and some fun



Celebrating Boss's Day – 16th October



Lenn Smith Fun Walk – 11th September



WITS. DRU FOR GOOD.



DRU staff Spring tea – 1st September

enABLE Newsletter feedback



[enABLE feedback form link](#)

*THANK YOU for reading this issue of **enABLE**, the Disability Rights Unit newsletter, and sharing in some of our moments from this year.*

Click on the link or scan the QR code to share your thoughts, suggestions, or feedback with us! Let your voice be heard!



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