

@DISABILITY.FOR GOOD.

Dear Witsies

I hope you enjoy our newsletter from the Disability Rights Unit (DRU). As the time is coming close for upcoming exams the DRU Team sends you best wishes!

Here are a few reminders to enhance your performance over this exam period! 1. Embrace Challenges: View exams as opportunities to showcase your knowledge and skills. 2. Stay Confident: Believe in yourself and your preparation. You've worked hard! 3. Take Care of Yourself: Prioritize your health—get enough sleep, eat well, and stay hydrated. 4. Stay Positive: Maintain a positive attitude; it can make a big difference in your performance.

rewarding, and I am truly thankful for the experiences and connections I've made along the way with both staff and students. Working with students with disabilities at Wits over the past 14 years has enriched my life in countless ways thanks to your inspiration. As I move on to the next chapter of my career, I

As this will be my last month at Wits and I prepare to say goodbye, I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you. My time here at Wits has been incredibly

carry with me the lessons learned and the wonderful moments we shared. Warm regards **Duncan Yates**

Neurodiversity and Mental Health Coordinator

@THE DISABILITY RIGHTS UNIT



The Disability Rights Unit (DRU) is committed to working towards overcoming accessibility barriers encountered by students with visual, hearing, physical, neurodivergent, psychosocial, and chronic illness-related disabilities. The DRU provides a wide range of support services tailored to address students' individual disability-related needs, ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities at Wits. This support may include using stateof-the-art assistive technology and other forms of human support. The DRU also offers guidance on the design of inclusive academic content and study environments and the promotion of disability sensitisation and awareness. For more information, please get in touch with the DRU to find out how you can be supported during your academic journey. **DRU Offices:**

• Our main office is located in the Solomon Mahlangu House Building, First Floor, East Wing, Braamfontein East Campus. Contact: Dr Leila Abdool Gafoor at leila.abdoolgafoor@wits.ac.za • Our satellite office is located in the Administration Block, First Floor, School of Education Campus, Parktown. Contact: Ms Kobela Petja at kobela.petja@wits.ac.za. Webpage: www.wits.ac.za/disability-rights-unit/

Wits DRU and Afretec lead the way Two-day workshop redefines inclusive education and how to leverage new technologies to empower students and staff with disabilities

disabilities."

The current landscape

Stigma and the invisible

comprehensive, individualized approach.

inclusive education systems in Africa.

@DISABILITY INCLUSION



Partnering with Afretec has been instrumental in enabling an impact-driven workshop. Afretec is a pan-African network of engineering and technology-focused universities that drives Inclusive Digital Transformation in Africa. Says Dr Heila Jordaan, Wits Afretec Programme Manager, "The Afretec Inclusion

and Diversity Working Group have done an outstanding job to make this workshop a most successful meeting of minds, all in the interest of making Higher Education accessible to and successful for students with various disabilities. Technological

developments for teaching and learning, and assistive technologies now means that

In her keynote address at the Workshop, Professor Diane Bell, Director of AT2030

all students with disabilities should be accommodated in education.

the DRU has been actively transforming universal access to higher education for decades. With this workshop, we wanted to create an opportunity to foster partnerships across Africa, and to share, learn, and discover ways to make our institutions more equal, accessible and welcoming for all students and staff with

Programme and Global Disability Innovation Hub, said globally, over one billion people, 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disability, with Africa reporting higher rates of between 17-20%. "Poverty, conflict, and lack of healthcare are some factors that contribute to this prevalence. For too long, disability has stood as a significant barrier to education and social participation, particularly in the Global South. However, emerging

assistive technologies, edtech, and artificial intelligence (Al) are poised to revolutionise the educational landscape, unlocking new opportunities for students

with disabilities," she said. **Key challenges: Barriers in education** Despite advancements in inclusive education, she said, "significant obstacles remain. In many countries, students with disabilities face outdated infrastructure, inaccessible facilities, and limited support services. The financial burden of assistive technology, and a lack of staff training, further impede their educational journey."

For students with invisible disabilities like learning disorders and mental health issues, fear of stigma often prevents disclosure. Others with sensory impairments struggle with inconsistent access to resources such as sign language interpreters and accessible digital content. These gaps call for innovative, accessible solutions. Students with complex needs—such as those with autism, mobility impairments, or multiple disabilities—are often overlooked, requiring tailored support and

coordinated services. Current systems fall short, demanding a more

Integration of Al Artificial intelligence, with its machine learning capabilities, is creating exciting opportunities for innovation and research to improve access and equity in education. Al-powered tools like chatbots, personalised and adaptive learning platforms, Al-based captioning and voice recognition, gamification, Emotional Al, VR/AR and many more assistive technologies are being used to develop adaptive learning environments.

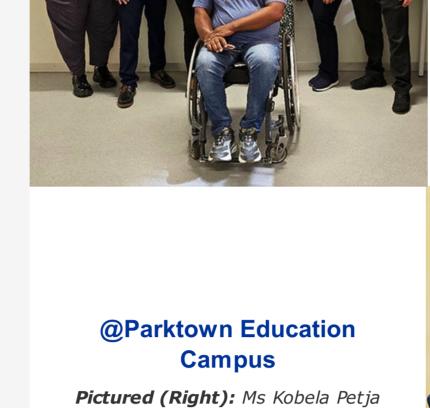
abilities. Developers must collaborate with educators and disability advocates to build universally accessible platforms," Bell emphasised. The way forward The workshop laid the groundwork for a groundbreaking initiative: the formation of an African Higher Education Disability group, uniting institutions across the continent committed to advancing disability inclusion. Wits University's Disability

Rights Unit (DRU) will spearhead this collaborative effort, driving the push for more

"Inclusive design must be a priority, ensuring learning technologies cater to all

Afretec will develop a white paper to guide institutions on the provision of assistive technology for students with disabilities.

@DRU TEAM @ Braamfontein Campus



and Ms Khetha Mbatha

@SRC DISABILITY REPRESENTATIVE

Farewell to the 2024 SRC Disability Representative

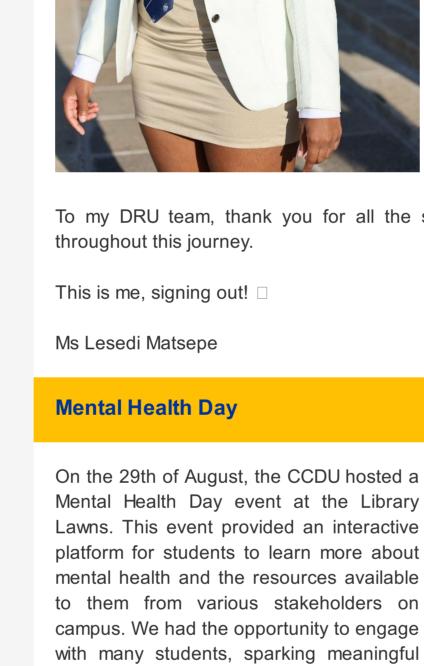
Disability Rights U

As my SRC term comes to an end, I am reminded of the iconic Beyoncé lyric: "The hearts I have touched will be the proof that I leave". This term felt incredibly short and it passed by quicker than I anticipated; however, I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to serve. The moments shared with students - either through helping them, having a conversation, and even shared

East

Pictured (Left): Back: Mx Tish Geddes, Mr Duncan Yates, Mrs Nomsa Mathebula, Dr Leila Abdool Gafoor, Mrs Subhashini Ellan, Mr Andrew Sam Front: Mr Alfred Tlou

laughter - are the true highlights of my term because they served as a constant reminder of why I took on this role. Advocating for disability inclusion has always been close to my heart and I hope



with disabilities.

disability issues.

knowledge about the DRU and various types of impairments, which added an exciting element of participation. Kobela and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It was truly rewarding to witness how eager and enthusiastic students were to expand their understanding of mental health and

Ms Lesedi Matsepe and Ms Kobela Petja

passion and love. To my DRU team, thank you for all the support and love that you have shown me

that even after my term is over, I leave a legacy of progress in the Wits community by passing over the baton to other individuals who will further advocate for students with disabilities with the same

LIFE COACHING PROGRAMME CAREER SERVICES conversations around mental well-being, particularly from the viewpoint of students HIV/AIDS PREVENTION In addition, we handed out prizes to students who demonstrated their

> social media platforms like Facebook to share exciting disability information and various funding and employment opportunities from external companies that have contacted us and are looking to assist

> 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

@SOCIAL MEDIA The DRU has been reaching students, staff, and prospective students through

Witsies.

Seeing the students' curiosity and willingness to engage reaffirmed the importance of

such initiatives in fostering a more inclusive and informed Wits community.

@UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT: Kopano Segwagwe

Gongratis



My name is Kopano Segwagwe, and I am a first-year biomedical science student at the University of the Witwatersrand. When I received my acceptance in 2023, I was thrilled to be a part of this prestigious institution, but my excitement was short-lived. In March of that year, I had to take a leave of absence due to a life-altering surgery —a right leg amputation resulting from cancer. The early days of my journey as a new amputee were overwhelming. Both physically and emotionally, I found myself struggling to come to terms with the immense changes in my life. I battled depression, constantly asking, "Why me?" I was faced with countless questions but very few answers. Everything I had once taken for granted now seemed impossible, and I felt trapped, forced to navigate a new reality that I wasn't ready for. The world, once so familiar, had become a place of limitations. Returning to university seemed unthinkable at first. I couldn't see how I could fit in as a student in such a large and able-bodied community. That was until I met Mrs. Subhashini and Andrew from the Disability Rights Unit. Their warm welcome and unwavering support gave me hope. For the first time, I began to believe that I didn't have to be afraid of coming back to Wits. But coming back wasn't the end of my challenges. Learning to live independently in residence, making new friends, and managing my academic workload all at my own

pace proved difficult. There were days when self-doubt crept in, and I questioned whether I was capable of continuing. It was through the support of my friends, the Counselling and Career Development Unit (CCDU), and my faith that I found strength. Joining a Christian revival church introduced me to a community that not only embraced me but also uplifted me. They reminded me of my worth and

My greatest aspiration now is to inspire young people with disabilities. I want to show them that despite the challenges, pursuing our dreams is not only possible but also within reach. Our disabilities do not define us—they make us stronger. And

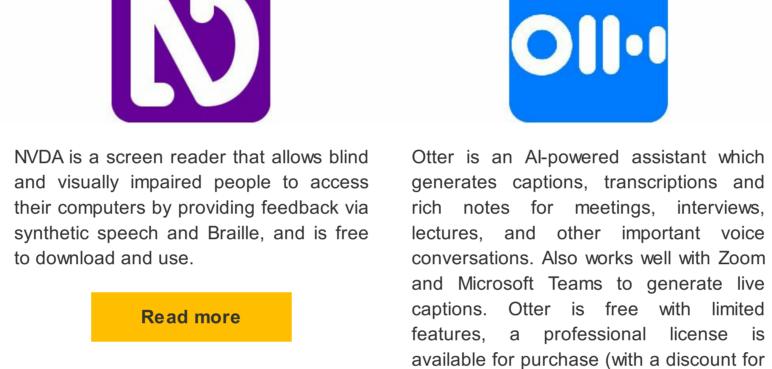
potential.

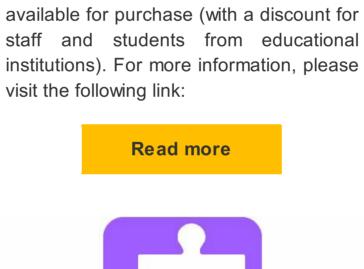
@TECHNOLOGY

that can help in your studies.

with that strength, we can conquer the world.

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





Google Live Caption and Live Transcribe Read&Write is a text-to-speech, literacy and writing support software which are a new speech-to-text accessibility integrates reading, writing, studying, and service built by Google for the deaf and hard of hearing, which performs real-time research support tools with common transcription of speech to text on your applications. Enhances accessibility by screen, so you can participate in offering features like reading out loud, conversations going on in the world built-in dictionaries, summary highlighters, around you. Live Caption can be enabled directly from Google Chrome and generates the

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 captions/subtitles when viewing media in with a Microsoft account using your such as online lectures. To enable Live Wits credentials, Username: Wits email address and Password: Wits ICT Similarly, there is the Live Transcribe app password. for Android users which provides Read more

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smart device.

Captions, please refer to the following

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