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UCT's dean of science takes a bow



Prof Maano Ramutsindela (left) and his wife, Takalani, at his farewell hosted at Glenara.

Photo: Lerato Maduna/UCT

Four years after taking up a position as the University of Cape Town's (UCT) dean of the Faculty of Science, Professor Maano Ramutsindela has stepped down to return to his first love: research and teaching.

Ramutsindela reluctantly took on the role in 2019 since being dean was not something he had thought about as a career because of his interest in teaching and research. Until then, he was with the Department of Environmental & Geographical Science, a position he took in 2001. His interest lies in human geography.

“Teaching has become part of me to the point that when I had to be dean it felt like I was leaving behind the students who I had been supervising and I felt very bad because it meant that I had compromised some of my own dedication and contribution to society,” he said.

“On the other hand, I needed to give service to something beyond myself, which is what made me take on the deanship. Colleagues in the office know that during my first interactions with them I said, ‘As long as I add to the humanity of the faculty, I will be satisfied’. That has been something important to me because I know I am not working with machines; we are human beings.”

Ramutsindela believes people have been stretched in various ways, including rising stress levels. “We have been overstretched by many processes that to some extent begin to empty our humanness. Our humanity is becoming thin because of the processes that are squeezing us.”

The next step for Ramutsindela – while also on academic sabbatical – will be to reflect on how the deanship has impacted him.

“On introspection in undertaking this role, I was confronted by what power would do to the values I hold; to my humanity, because I knew it was going to change me, but would it be for the better or the worst? And on reflection, I’ll have to go back to this question and say the position has improved or taken away from me and those are things I will have to rebuild.”

Interestingly, it was the Interim Vice-Chancellor Emeritus Professor Daya Reddy who was part of the panel that approved the decision to appoint Ramutsindela as dean.

“Needless to say, there was overwhelming support for his suitability for the position,” said Reddy at a Leadership Lekgotla farewell event held in honour of Ramutsindela. “The Faculty of Science has been fortunate to be led by somebody with your leadership qualities. It is to your first love that you will be returning. We certainly look forward to further contributions from you in the domain of research and teaching.”

Story by Kamva Somdyala, UCT News

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