



SOL PLAATJE  
UNIVERSITY

DEC 2019  
SPECIAL FAREWELL EDITION

# e-BRIEF

## Farewell

**PROF YUNUS BALLIM**

VICE-CHANCELLOR  
2013-2019



### AS SPU FAMILY, WE SAY OUR GOODBYES TO PROFESSOR YUNUS BALLIM THIS MONTH

Prof Ballim has greatly endeared himself to us. He has truly embraced not only SPU but also Kimberley and the Northern Cape.

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### FAREWELL COMRADE

When the senior leadership of a university can dance together in the metaphorical sense, then it is because they are listening to the same beat and moving in the same direction.

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### Edwinah Engelser

*Registrar's Office, part of the initial team*

Prof, you've never been hesitant in sharing your wisdom. You've always allowed us to operate with freedom.

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### Sonet van Niekerk

*Manager: Academic Administration*

It was truly a life-changing experience to be part of the first 15 SPU staff members in 2014.

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### Johane Hlatywayo

*Part of the initial team*

It was a great pleasure working with you, Professor Ballim - the torchbearer at Sol Plaatje university.

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"WE WANT THIS UNIVERSITY TO BE PART OF THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THE CITY." ~ Prof Ballim

### Simone Neethling

*Part of the initial team*

Thank you for the past six years of guidance, support and leadership.

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### Spencer Hodgson

*New Universities Project Management Team*

Few people know of Prof Ballim's role and impact on the early planning of South Africa's two new universities.

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### Shannon Langson

*One of the 1st students to register at SPU*

When I started studying at Sol Plaatje University I was a really shy person. I did not know what to expect but I was excited.

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THE SPU E-BRIEF IS PRODUCED BY THE SOL PLAATJE UNIVERSITY FOR ITS EMPLOYEES.  
Contributions, comments and suggestions are welcome and these can be sent to [kashini.maistry@spu.ac.za](mailto:kashini.maistry@spu.ac.za)  
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## As SPU family, we say our goodbyes to Professor Yunus Ballim this month

Prof Ballim has greatly endeared himself to us. He has truly embraced not only SPU but also Kimberley and the Northern Cape.

At his recent farewell dinner, the Chairperson of Council, Madam Justice Yvonne Mokgoro and I reached a consensus that Prof Ballim knows more about the Northern Cape than Justice Mokgoro and I together (and both of us were born and bred in the Northern Cape!).

This amazing feat can be ascribed to Prof Ballim's outlook on life in general and on his calling in particular.

He is one of those unique individuals who was born to lead. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the renowned American poet and philosopher, famously said: "Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail".

That epitomises Prof Ballim, a great leader who not only helped conceive the concept of a university for the Northern Cape (as part of the Task Team), but also helped give birth to SPU and brought it up to where it is now, a singular beacon of excellence in our tertiary education landscape.

This institution's remarkable academic results speak for themselves. In a sea of prophets of doom, naysayers, unabashed critics and cynical sceptics, we have not only survived the storms and headwinds, but we are firmly on course, in no small part due to the sterling efforts of a terrific helmsman.

The SPU Strategic Plan for 2020-2024, steered in large part by Prof Ballim, maps out our course post the Ballim era.

### Its four main objectives are:

- to strengthen research activities
- to consolidate and sustain the institution's focus on good quality teaching and learning
- to develop SPU as a digitally empowered university
- to ensure that the university is financially sustainable into the future.

A solid foundation has been laid for us to achieve these goals.

To repeat what I said at the farewell dinner: Prof Ballim is a leading expert in concrete and materials.

His doctoral thesis was: "Curing and the durability of concrete". It entailed a comprehensive investigation into the effects of early age curing on the durability of concrete.

As I said then – Prof Ballim is a concrete example of the quintessential leader who leads by example and who walks the walk far more than he talks the talk.

With his unwavering commitment, selfless dedication and sterling leadership, we at SPU have been left with a durable legacy of excellence.

In his farewell message in last month's edition, Prof Ballim touchingly quotes from an email which he sent out at the end of the first week of lectures at SPU during February 2014 to SPU staff, the then Interim Council and Department of Higher Education officials in which he said that "...it was individual and collective belief, by all involved, in the idea of a Sol Plaatje University, that made [the initial success] possible".

In vintage Ballim style, he continued as follows in that email:

*"The waters now are uncertain  
but the winds are favourable  
and the billowed sails look like  
puffed-up cheeks of smiling young  
students. Our compass is set to  
the star rising on the horizon".*

All we can say to that is "aye-aye Captain, all hands are on deck".

If in conclusion, I may adapt a moving speech made by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, to his friend, Mahatma Gandhi, whose life had just been taken in a shocking assassination: "In ages to come... people will think of this generation when this man...trode [at SPU] and will think of us who, however small, could also follow his path... Let us be worthy of him".

Go well our dear leader, friend and inspiration.

You have laid a firm foundation, cast in the most durable concrete for us to continue to construct a solid, proud edifice of learning.

Our most sincere gratitude for your selfless service, far above and beyond the call of duty.

**Your legacy will be immutable and enduring. We shall do our utmost to be worthy of you.**

**Judge Steven Majiedt**  
Sol Plaatje University Chancellor

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## Farewell Comrade

When the senior leadership of a university can dance together in the metaphorical sense, then it is because they are listening to the same beat and moving in the same direction.



Yunus and I found we were able to keep in step. Although, sometimes he would lead and other times I would try to wander off in my own direction. He would always try to accommodate my different style but would also emphatically lead me to where we both had to go together. I will miss him as my "dance" partner.

I will miss him calling me "comrade" in moments when we were both tired and needed to regroup. I knew in those instances that I was part of something special here at SPU and that we were building a lasting legacy. I know that each of us are committed to keeping it alive and nurturing it.

**Prof Mary Jean Baxen**  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor



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## Message from the Registrar's Office

Prof, you've never been hesitant in sharing your wisdom. You've always allowed us to operate with freedom. You've never been reluctant in giving us authority. You've let us make mistakes. Even if they were costly.



You've believed in us even when we have been in doubt. You've shown the world what a great boss you are.

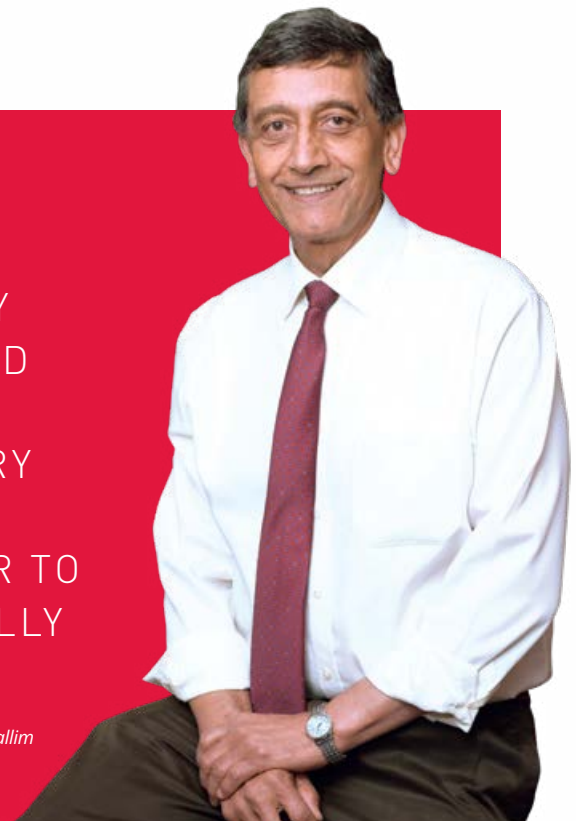
From milestones and targets, to motivation and progress from failures and setbacks, to moving ahead and success. You've stood with us through all these things.

Your leadership is what has kept us going. May you have many exciting adventures ahead.

**Thank you for leading this  
University with honesty,  
integrity and humility.**

**Edwinah Egeler**  
*Registrar's Office and part of  
the initial team*

"WHEN FACED WITH THESE TYPES OF CONFLICTING INITIATIVES, PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IS BEST SERVED IF CITIZENS WERE GIVEN FULL ACCESS TO NECESSARY INFORMATION, IN AN UNDERSTANDABLE MANNER TO ALLOW THEM TO INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY MAKE REASONED DECISIONS." ~ Prof Ballim



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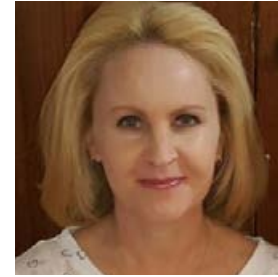
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## Message from the Academic Administration

It was truly a life-changing experience to be part of the first 15 SPU staff members in 2014, with Prof Yunus Ballim at the forefront of this exciting new venture.



This diverse group of people quickly became a family and managed to make this impossible dream a reality.

It was a challenging time where processes and documentation had to be developed at an incredible pace but the raw excitement of the staff and our inspirational then Interim Leader (later VC) carried us through.

*A charismatic man with an incredible wealth of knowledge, inspired staff, students and the public alike. He was very passionate, not only about the wellbeing of the students but the development of his staff.*

I was reminded at the HERS-SA conference in Cape Town, where he gave a presentation on "New brooms sweeping clean - Reflections from the newly-established Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley", how he inspired all with his forward-thinking ideas of what a high-quality University should be.

**He has made us better people as a result of his presence and left deep footprints in the academic history in Kimberley.**

**I wish Prof Ballim all the best in his future endeavours.**

**Sonet van Niekerk**  
*Manager: Academic Administration and part of the initial team*



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## It was a great pleasure working with you

Having you, Prof Ballim, as a torchbearer at Sol Plaatje university, was a blessing. You were a pillar at SPU.



Without you, Prof, SPU wouldn't be where it is today. Thank you for your dedication, passion and skills to start this university from the ground.

Your commitment to excellence and to make SPU project a success story is amazing and well appreciated.

I still remember when we started in 2014. There was absolutely nothing to show.

But today we speak of well-established infrastructures, programmes running and producing graduates.

Thank you for all the support and guidance you have provided. We will keep remember you forever with much gratitude in our hearts.

**Goodbye "Malume"  
and all the best  
for your future  
endeavours! You will  
be greatly missed.**

*Johane Hlatywayo  
Part of the initial team*



**"I ATTRACT GOOD PEOPLE LIKE I  
ATTRACT GOOD STUDENTS. AND THIS  
WILL BE A GREAT UNIVERSITY."** ~ Prof Ballim

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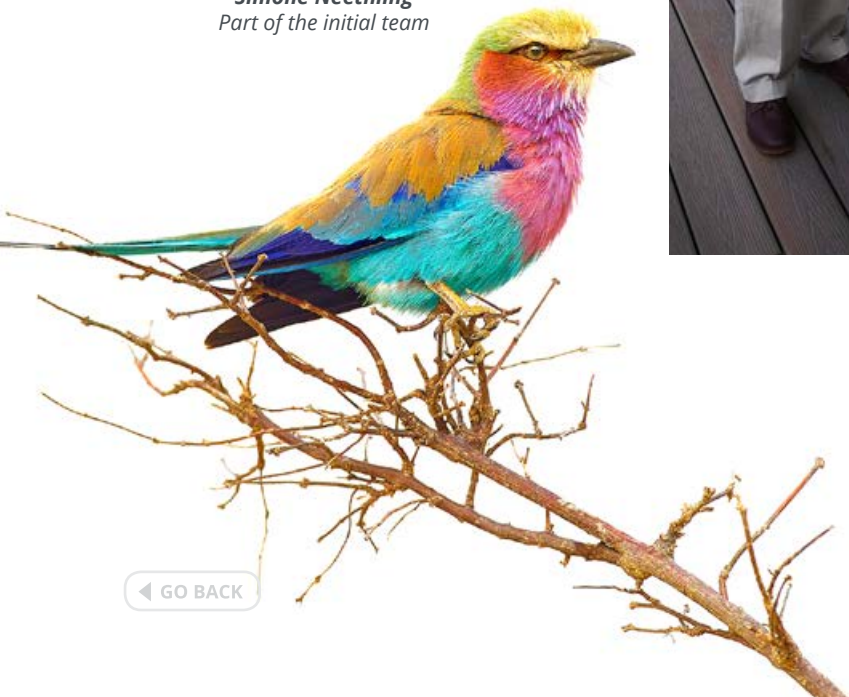
## Thank you for the past six years of guidance, support and leadership

Coming to Kimberley for the first time and moving here was a daunting experience but having you lead this university has always made me feel at peace and confident about our powerful vision.

Your knowledge, not just on cement but on many diverse topics, is astounding – having conversations with you were intimidating but, at the same time, fascinating.

**Thank you for always giving your all, for all the amazing conversations, for the bird watching but, most of all thank you for your passion to strive for quality education and your consistent dedication that will always be an inspiration to me.**

*Simone Neethling*  
Part of the initial team



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## Message from the New Universities Project Management Team

Few people know of Professor Ballim's role and impact on the early planning of South Africa's two new universities, long before SPU was established.



As far back as 2012, he represented Wits on the New Universities Project Steering Committee together with representatives from other universities and the two provinces, Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape.

In fact, he was Deputy Chair and was asked to chair the Committee's first meeting on 9 March 2012.

The minutes of that meeting record his emphasis "that the Steering Committee's approach should be based on the principle of "eyes on, hands-off".

It should keep its eye on the governance and process aspects and keep its hands off the management, which is the responsibility of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Project Management Team.

During this period, the wisdom of establishing two new universities was questioned in some academic and political circles.

However, neither DHET nor Prof Ballim wavered and it was within the Steering Committee that the broad vision for the new universities took shape. It was subsequently published for public comment on 31 August 2012 and went a long way to address the concerns of the critics.

Interestingly, the minutes of meeting in March 2012 recorded that it "was a "tall ask" for SPU and the University of Mpumalanga to be fully functional and take in students in 2014 and that this could be feasible under certain conditions.

That this was achieved is due in part to Prof Ballim's quiet confidence which inspired those who worked with him.

Since then, Prof Ballim has continued in his unwavering belief that SPU has a vital role to play in the regeneration of Kimberley and the Northern Cape.

He has inspired our designers and builders to deliver cutting edge university facilities while insisting that this be done within reasonable budget parameters.

**On behalf of the  
NUPMT, I would like  
to join all at SPU to  
express our best  
wishes to Prof Ballim in  
his future endeavours.  
Wherever he goes, he  
will continue to assert  
his good-natured  
leadership. and be an  
asset to our country.**

*Spencer Hodgson  
New Universities Project  
Management Team (NUPMT)*

**"THIS UNIVERSITY MUST BE ACCESSIBLE  
TO ALL IN THE PROVINCE."** ~ Prof Ballim

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## Words from one of the first students to register at the University

When I started studying at Sol Plaatje University I was a really shy person. I did not know what to expect but I was excited. Listening to Prof Ballim's speech at the very first opening day in 2014 made me feel even more excited.



I remember Prof saying that – "Today we are making history". The professor made a really great speech which made us all look forward to what's to come.

Now, looking back and looking at everything that has been accomplished up until now, the prof was not all talk but he has accomplished everything which he planned.

Prof was not the type of person that just sat in an office all day. He got to know the students, he watched the movie – "The Matrix", with us and always asked for our opinions and suggestions on his ideas.

Through his speech and his actions, he has inspired and motivated us to always achieve our best.

*He made us believe that we are capable of  
doing the best and becoming the best.*

Prof has established the university as not just an institution but a family and a community, where we feel like we belong.

**I wish Prof the best  
in his future plans. I  
will always remember  
the values and morals  
he has taught us.  
Especially, the value  
of being punctual and  
respecting one another,  
irrespective of our  
differences.**

**Shannon Langson**  
*One of the first students to register at SPU*

**"OUR STUDENTS ARE WILLING TO  
LEARN AND THEIR RESULTS HAVE  
SHOWN THAT A HIGH-LEVEL OF  
INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY IN THE  
CITY CAN BE ATTAINED."** ~ Prof Ballim



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