

# The UKZN Griot Of Absences and Presences

The blathering neo-colonial road show euphemistically called the World Cup has moved on to its next target, Brazil. Perhaps we should take stock of the consequences of South Africa temporarily ceding its governance and economy to imperialist raiders from the North.



WORDS: KEYAN G TOMASELLI

Who can forget the Kulula 'alternative carrier' ad that did not depict a soccer ball, cup or stadium? Or, the hapless corner café owner who in 2009 wrote "2010" on his shop blackboard? Dire warnings were immediately issued by FIFA's trademark police. This, while simultaneously complaining about the lack of Cup publicity.

Innocently wearing branded short pants at the Cricket World Cup some years ago we witnessed a bunch of schoolkids being evicted from a stadium because they were deemed to have committed the crime of "ambush marketing". Thus are the innocent treated like criminals by corporate sports' global enforcers. Trade marking is now visible on just about every form of casual wear. Damned if we do and damned if we don't.

The information age has trademarked real words (or the absence of them), sequences of numbers and who can advertise what, when and how.

So what were the benefits of World Cup mania for UKZN? The foolishness of Football Fridays? Some students got to study popular resistance in Durban in the context of the event. Academics got to have an extra-long mid-year vacation.

Now, the public thinks that academics are always on vacation. We know this because some academics never apply for leave. So if they have not taken leave they cannot be accused of being absent. Like FIFA, which sues companies for absence/presence, these invisibles are protected by leave policy designed by legislators who have no idea what it is that academics actually do, what kinds of leave they require to do it, when they do it, and how often and for how long they need to do (or not) do it.

I once calculated the number of days annually I was required to represent UKZN on NRF committees in Pretoria. To my horror the number was greater than the total available to me through my Special Leave (SL) allowance.

Many disciplines take their students into the field for practicals. I was once threatened with disciplinary action because I had dared to vacate the concrete neon-lit, airless classroom that

resembled a prison. My so-called line manager told me that the University offers a 'service' to students that requires that we remain in the classroom at all times, teach out of a book that someone else has written, and treat students as 'clients'. This from someone who could never be found because he was never on leave! Well, the students' told him off. He whimpered back to his swimming pool.

So what do we do with SL? If we take it we soon exhaust it. I am now banking my SL and no doubt will soon be called to account for the growing deficit caused by attending NRF meetings and dragging students through radio stations in remote towns and in the bush where they learn about the real world. These activities are not recognized by Excel spreadsheets or predetermined HR categories. UKZN rewards academics via the Research Office to do research. Human Resources penalizes them when they need to conduct that research – or educate students – in the field. The solution: we are told to "override" the software by submitting the application on hard copy. This tends to make line managers very nervous. Geography, geology, zoology, botany, and others must all have similar qualms about the leave categories by which we are policed, restricted, and contained.

I am the first to agree that universities should know what their academic staff are doing and where they are. But the leave categories that work on the factory floor or the headquarters of the investment house are anachronistic in learning and research environments. They just get in the way. They are demoralizing and they result in undue caution. Innovation falters, creativity is muted and lateral thought is narrowed. Certainly, Professor Charlie Epps, a physicist and FBI consultant in the TV series *Numbers* could not do either of his jobs (which exist in a synergetic relationship) had he had to negotiate the byzantine leave system that applies at UKZN. The fictional FBI would be all the poorer for it. So would physics, maths and crime detection. Branding is not just a badge. It's a short-hand sign that communicates our institutional personality, the values of the

# UKZN STUDENTS Work at Soccer World Cup

A crew of students from UKZN is over the moon at having had the once in a lifetime opportunity to work at Moses Mabhida Stadium during the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup for international company, Host Broadcast Services (HBS).

WORDS: LUNGA MEMELA PHOTO: SUPPLIED

HBS is a specialist host broadcast organisation which was originally established with the core mandate of producing the television and radio signals for the 2002 and 2006 FIFA World Cups™.

Around 30 UKZN students were split into various departments and worked as production interns. The students received extensive training from May 2009 to be ready for the games and are overjoyed to have played a major helping hand in the smooth-running of the event.

Majoring in Mathematics, Science and Technology at UKZN's School of Education Studies, Mr Mxolisi Sithole was one of the students working at the stadium. "It was so overwhelming and an unforgettable experience. Meeting all those tourists



UKZN students and their colleagues who worked at the Moses Mabhida Stadium during the FIFA 2010 Soccer World Cup.

and working so closely with HBS was amazing."

"Knowing that the world was watching the World Cup through our work was pushing us and motivating us to do a fantastic job," said Mr Rogerant Tshibangu.

Commentary Manager for

audio communication circuits, Mr Karl Malone from Ireland said it was a pleasure to work with the students. "The students were ... hard-working and always managed to put in extra hours in this once in a lifetime opportunity," he said.

## Sudoku

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					9		8	
	5	2		1				
		6						
2	3	1		5			7	6
	9						1	3
					1			2
		4				3		
	6			3	2		7	4

institution, and the reliability of our product – the development of learning strategies, knowledge, and educated graduates.

So endeth my fifth column. I am still employed and still quantifying outputs for the never-ending demands issued by UKZN computerized systems whose appetite for information (whether realistic or not) is relentless.

*Keyan Tomaselli is Director of the Centre for Communication, Media and Society.*

## THE UKZNDABA TEAM

Nomonde Mbadi – Executive Director; Smita Maharaj – Director: Communications; Deanne Collins – Publications Manager; Neesha Maharaj – Journalist; Lunga Memela – Journalist; Vidhya Singh – Layout & Design.

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