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Smart cities, self-driving cars, reduced disease in sights of SA data science boffins

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Using data analytics to help combat disease, create intelligent transport systems with self-driving vehicles and smart cities, and improve the quality of manufactured goods – these are just some of the research areas to be explored by the first cohort of Masters students to benefit from a new data science fellowship supported by TFG.

Natalie Alexander is an aspiring data scientist and bioinformaticist from the Cape Flats, with a BSc in Molecular Biology and Biotechnology and a BSc Honours in Bioinformatics and Computational Biology behind her name.

After being selected for TFG's annual Data Science and Leadership Fellowship, she will be starting an MSc in Data Science at the University of Cape Town this year, with an ambition to help reduce the suffering from disease experienced in South Africa and globally.

Her research focus combines data science, bioinformatics, genetics, microbiology and epidemiology.

Tsholofelo Phasha hopes to make a difference in the field of human and socio-economic rights, providing advice and insights that improve social justice over time. She will be enrolling at the University of Pretoria for an MSc in Mathematics and Data Analytics. Her research project will focus on the application of data science in Statistical Process Control, an aspect of quality control, during the manufacturing process.

Andrew Boyley wants to “improve the technology-driven world one line of code at a time”. For his MSc in Data Science at Wits, Andrew's research will focus on the development of autonomous vehicles and transportation systems in a “fully connected city of the future”.

“I am passionate about using cutting-edge technologies to improve transportation and create smarter, more connected cities, and my research aims to explore the potential of these technologies to bring about meaningful change in the world,” says Andrew.

The three are among the first six recipients of the Data Science and Leadership Fellowship established by leading fashion and homeware retailer TFG to accelerate the development of one of the country's most scarce and critical skills.

The fellowship will fund the 1st and 2nd year of study towards either a research or coursework MSc in data science across five leading South African universities. Successful candidates are selected on the basis of academic excellence, and high levels of innovation, creativity and leadership.

It is open to all South Africans although preference is given to under-represented groups.

TFG CEO Anthony Thunström said the research projects being pursued by the successful candidates for 2023 showed the enormous potential of data analytics to contribute to the common good.



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“These young men and women will help to shape a brave new world in which the transformative power of big data will equip us to deal with some of the critical issues of our time, faster and more efficiently than has ever been possible before.

“I’d like to congratulate them on being selected from a very competitive field as worthy recipients of our Data Science and Leadership Fellowship. For TFG, this fellowship is about growing the pool of talent in this dynamic field and we are excited to see where their studies take them,” Thunström said.

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