

# Memories and moments of the USB's first decade

The USB will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2014. In the run up to next year, **Heindrich Wyngaard** has asked some of the USB's alumni to share memories of the first 10 years of the School's existence. Here are their stories.

**I**t was a long time ago, close to 50 years to be precise. Naturally, then, memory fades, but fortunately there are still those who remember what life at the USB was like back then.

Prof Helgaard Muller was attached to the School from its inception in 1964 to 1988. He was also director of the USB from 1975 to 1987. During this time, a large part of his responsibility was academic planning. Under Prof Muller's leadership, the School strove for greater cooperation with Europe and the USA, more research, closer ties with business leaders, and drawing faculty from abroad.

In 1976, the Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management was founded at the USB to present business development programmes in self-governing black states. By 1979, 171 MBA and 21 DBA students were enrolled. Permanent faculty consisted of four professors and four senior lecturers. Land for the School's Bellville Park Campus was acquired in 1981. The modular MBA was introduced in 1982, and the first Belgian exchange students arrived at the USB. The Department of Business Management and Administration (now the USB) relocated to the Bellville Park Campus in 1986.

The first building which housed the Business School in Merriman Lane, Stellenbosch.

Says Muller: "I remember, fondly, the commitment of the staff members who assisted on a part-time basis, as well as the positive attitude of the students." In those days, students had to submit typewritten or handwritten assignments as opposed to emailing tasks today. Truth be told, save for one incident with a student from Holland, not much thought was given to the possibility of plagiarism back then. This peace of mind was based on the fact that the School attracted top students, Muller reasons. Quite a number of these students were already well established in their professions.

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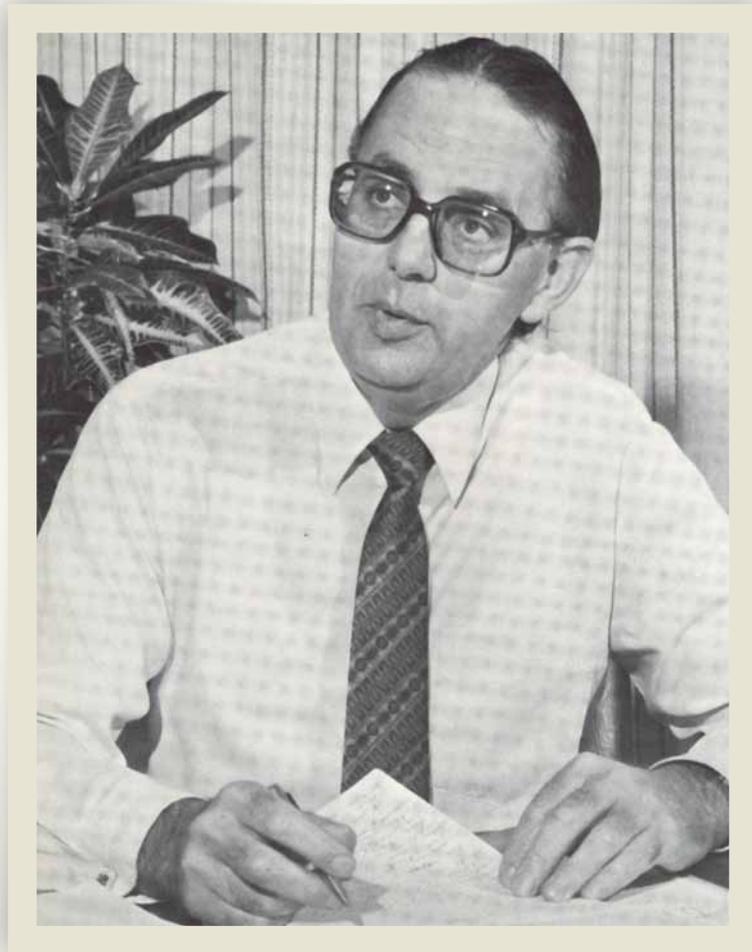
Dr Alwyn du Plessis was one of the first MBA students when the School opened its doors in 1964. He completed his studies the following year. "One must not lose sight of the fact that our first intake of students was used as guinea pigs and that the lecturers, too, still had to find their way," says Du Plessis. "On the other hand, we learned a lot from each other as students as well as from the lecturers."

Du Plessis also remembers some of the 'characters'. Prof Jan van der Meulen, USB director from 1964 to 1972, was 'one of a kind' who instilled in Du Plessis a love for financial management – despite the fact that students had to fine-tune their listening not to get lost in translation. Van der Meulen would, as an example, pronounce *net worth* as 'net worse', which sounded to his audience like the Afrikaans translation for sausage.

Back then, Du Plessis tells us, very few assignments had to be completed. Instead,



**PROF HELGAARD MULLER,**  
director of the USB from  
1975 to 1987



they had to do case studies, especially under Muller and Van der Meulen. “Our first assignment was for a Mr Wessels who lectured on General Management. The assignment dealt with the use of ratios in controlling a business. Wessels was obsessed with Simon’s Administrative Behaviour which, naturally, was a ‘behavioural approach’ to management. Our second assignment was for Prof Jan Sadie on the 1964 (national) budget.”

His first assignment he had typed at work, says Du Plessis. His second was handwritten.

“At one point, I had to do a presentation on Computer Technology. After the presentation, JJ van Rensburg, who we referred to as *Die Stem (The Voice)*, reprimanded me for speaking on a subject I knew nothing about.”

Du Plessis took it in his stride; after all, Van Rensburg was head of IT at the insurance giant Santam.

“One remembers the good more than the unpleasant,” says Du Plessis, even when the good could easily have turned into something less pleasant. Consider the following: With the release of the final results it was recorded, next to his name, that he was absent during the writing of the Marketing exam. That was not true, and he did not know how it came to be.

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But he was not the only person who was concerned about it. The same Van Rensburg referred to earlier, came over to

his house on the Saturday after the results were released, looking for an explanation. So Van Rensburg made it his mission to help find out and later that day he returned with the mystery solved: The Marketing lecturer handed in the results telephonically and omitted Du Plessis’s name.

Van Rensburg’s intervention, says Du Plessis, bears testimony to the close bond among classmates and lecturers, and all the good memories he has of the School. 

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**SHARE YOUR USB MEMORIES**

Do you have stories and photographs that you would like to share with us from your time at the USB? Please contact us at [usb50@usb.ac.za](mailto:usb50@usb.ac.za). We look forward to hearing from you!