

Eulogy for Prof Maxi Schoeman

Daniela Marggraff

“For many of us, Prof. was immortal... a piece of her lives on in all of us”

Remembering Maxi Schoeman

A memorial event for Professor Maxi Schoeman (29/11/1954-14/09/2025) was held at the University of Pretoria on 30 September 2025. The following is a eulogy that was delivered by Dr Daniela Marggraff.

I had the privilege of working very closely alongside Professor Schoeman for the last few years at the Ocean Regions Programme (ORP). I also had the honour of being supervised by her for my Honours, Masters and PhD, and had just started a post-doc under her supervision a few weeks ago.

On behalf of the ORP, which, in hindsight, was her final academic project, I would like to share a few words. The following is a joint contribution by Dr Yu-Shan Wu, Ms Tshegofatso Ramachela and Dr Samuel Oyewole.

In the spirit of Prof. Schoeman, I will keep it as short as possible, since I can quite literally hear her whispering to me to stop making such a fuss and rather focus on writing some journal articles.

At the ORP, we are focused on the centrality of the ocean to global politics from an African perspective. We see the ocean as this great connector. And in many ways, that is exactly what Prof. was. She embodied the ocean as being this great bridge-builder, unifier and enabler. She had this amazing ability to meet people from around the world, and bring us together, such that we at the ORP have really formed an extended family worldwide.

And at the fore of this was always including us, younger students and helping us build our networks and careers. I can remember countless times when she “shouted” at me when I forgot my business card at home, knowing full well that she had also forgotten hers. But that sums up Prof. She always wanted to empower us students to build our future, because as she often said to me, and I suppose now, tragically so, “Ms Marggraff, I don’t know how much longer I’ll be around” and then she would proceed to smoke her cigarette and roll her eyes.

For many of us, Prof. was immortal. We all know how many times Prof. said that she was retiring—in fact when I started my Honours with her, she said she was retiring and then after I finished my PhD, she said this time she was *really* retiring. Those of us who were supervised by her also know that each one of us were supposed to be the last student she accepted, and yet, a month ago, she was already making plans to take on her last, last, last student.

After much reflection these last few weeks, I have come to the realisation that in a way, Prof. remains immortal. And I don’t mean that in the typical sense, where we remember the writings of someone great and their ideas live on. I mean, without doubt, Prof. was a profound scholar and her contribution to literature will forever remain with us. But I mean that Prof. left behind a living structure, because she didn’t only have an impact on many of us, she truly guided us, inspired us, challenged us and made us better humans, such that a piece of her lives on in all of us.

While Prof. took academia and our studies immensely seriously, she also taught us about retaining perspective. As Tshegofatso recalls, whenever she was facing doubt, whenever imposter syndrome crept in and writing felt impossible, Prof. would firmly say, “Just get the damn thing on paper. *Jy moet net skryf*, we deal with the rest later”. It was her way of reminding us to get over ourselves, put our thoughts down and then work through them together. Our studies were important, but they were not everything—Prof. wanted us to be well-rounded, not only students, but human-beings and I think that is what truly matters in life.

As Yu-Shan explains, Prof. Schoeman had a no-nonsense approach to work, but did this in the kindest way possible. She was so accomplished, yet could relate to the most human of experiences (that is mothering). Prof. Schoeman was truly rare in that she could carry so many truths at once.

Finally, as Samuel explains, Prof. Schoeman had this rare and special way of listening—not just to the words, but the ideas behind them. She inspired us to explore new terrains, to think beyond boundaries, to ask bigger questions, and to pursue the difficult, but necessary work of understanding complex global dynamics. Working with Prof. was more than just a professional collaboration; it was a continuous learning experience guided by her generosity, wisdom and unwavering belief in the potential of others.

And so, in concluding, I thought it would be apt to recount a phrase another colleague so beautifully articulated last week: “A great tree has fallen. But from this the seeds then sprout and grow.” And so although we at the ORP are devastated by this monumental loss, we are equally humbled by the fact that Prof. chose to share her passion, knowledge and skills with so many of us, such that her legacy really can continue.

Prof. Schoeman, from the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for everything. Rest easy.