



UKZN Postgraduate Students Gain Real-World HDSS Field Experience in Umlazi Ward 88

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[Postgraduate students from UKZN participated in a field activation day hosted by USINGA](#)

The Umlazi Surveillance Initiative to Nurture Grassroots Action (USINGA), hosted an immersive field activation day for postgraduate students on 9 March 2026. The activity formed part of the Postgraduate Bootcamp of the Population and Development Discipline within the School of Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu – Natal (UKZN).

The programme commenced with a presentation by Dr Nompumelelo Mbele, the USINGA Nodal Director, who introduced students to USINGA and provided an overview of the functioning of a Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS). She outlined the core processes of longitudinal data collection, including household enumeration, routine follow-up visits, and the recording of key demographic events such as births, deaths, and migration.

Following the presentation, students were issued USINGA's signature lime-green T-shirts, symbolically integrating them into the field team and marking their transition into practical field engagement.

The field visit thereafter proceeded to Umlazi, with activities focusing primarily on Ward 88. On arrival, participants were welcomed by members of the Community Advisory Board (CAB), who outlined their role in ensuring that USINGA's research remains aligned with community priorities and ethical practice. Representatives from the Community Policing Forum (CPF) also highlighted their contribution to the safety and security of



fieldworkers during data collection.

Participants were subsequently divided into groups and engaged in structured door-to-door fieldwork alongside experienced USINGA field staff. During these engagements, students interacted with community members, communicated the purpose of the research, and observed fieldwork techniques in practice under continuous supervision from the USINGA team.



[Physically demanding terrain](#)

The primary objective of the activation was to provide students with direct exposure to community-based research. The exercise emphasised practical engagement with research participants and the operational realities of conducting population-based fieldwork.

Field conditions presented challenges, including high temperatures and physically demanding terrain characterised by extended walking distances. Despite this, students remained actively engaged and demonstrated adaptability throughout the exercise.

Overall, the activation was positively received. Students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to translate theoretical knowledge into practice and noted that the experience enhanced their understanding of population and health research while strengthening their interest in future field-based work.