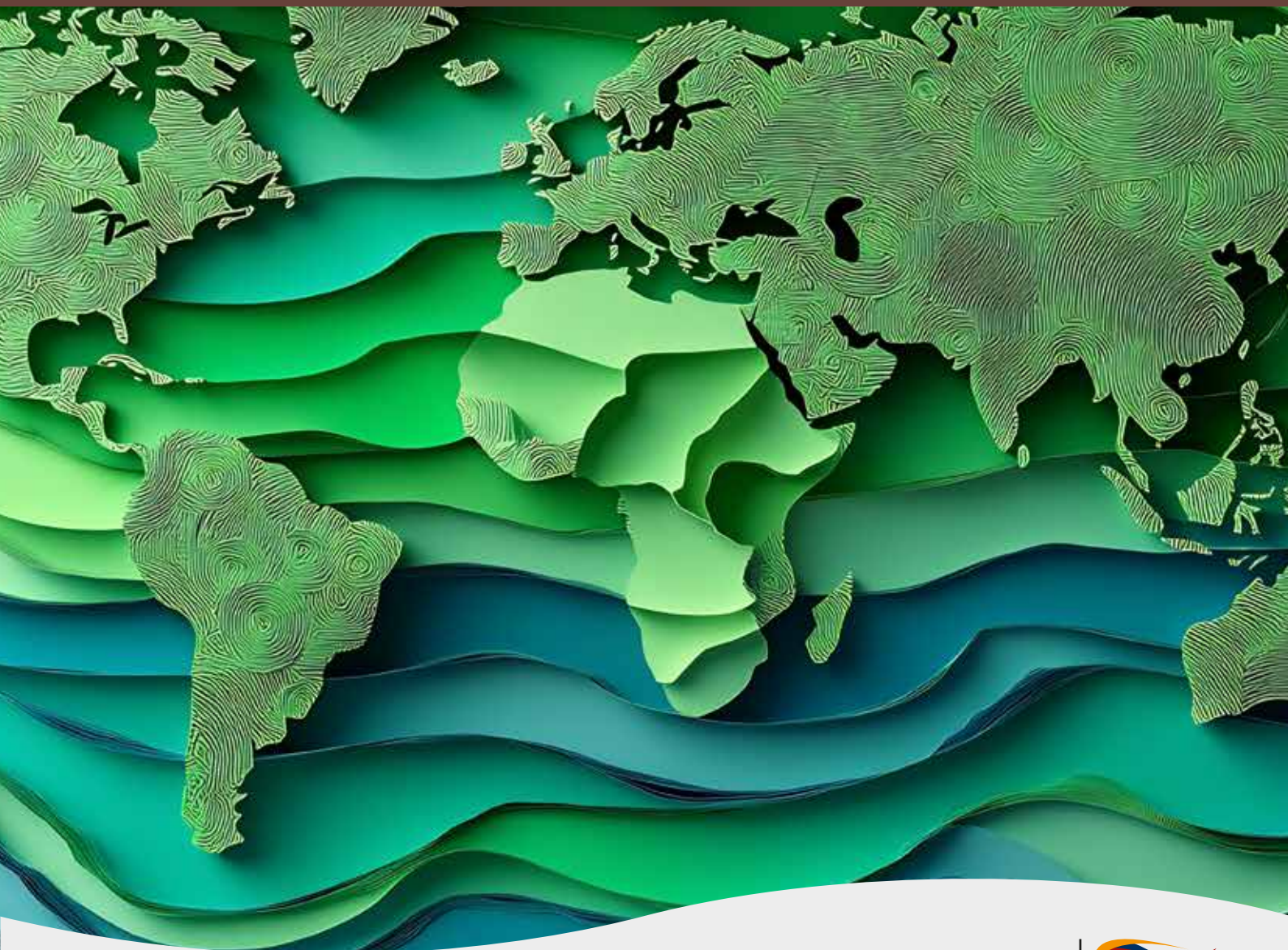


Environmental Careers

A guide to preparing for
career opportunities



Define tomorrow.

UNISA



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The information in this publication is correct as of 10 January 2026. Visit the Unisa Counselling and Career Development [downloads page](#) to check for updates.

Please check the Unisa qualifications webpage (<http://www.unisa.ac.za/qualifications>) regularly for updates related to available qualifications and the admission requirements to study.

How will this brochure help you?

- It will help you gain more information about the skills needed for careers related to the environment.
- It will help you identify possible career opportunities related to the environment.
- It will assist you in finding environment-related qualifications offered by Unisa.

What problems do you want to solve

“Don’t ask kids what they want to be when they grow up but what problems they want to solve. This changes the conversation from who do I want to work for, to what do I need to learn to be able to do that.”

Jaime Casap, Google Global Education Evangelist

One way to think about your career is by focusing on the **problems you care about**, not only on job titles. This shifts the question from “*What do I want to become?*” to “*What do I want to contribute?*”

Activity

1. Write down some problems or challenges you care about — in your family, community, South Africa, Africa, or the world.
2. Think about how you might contribute to solving them.
3. Ask: *What skills or knowledge would I need to prepare myself for that role?*

Example: You may want to address the challenge of protecting natural resources while supporting sustainable development in communities. Think about the different individuals who can contribute to solving this challenge: environmental scientists, environmental managers, conservationists, policy analysts, urban and regional planners, community development practitioners, and local government officials.

As an environmental professional, you may assess environmental risks, monitor ecosystems, and evaluate the impact of human activities on natural systems. Environmental managers and policy analysts may design and implement strategies that promote sustainable land use, waste management, or climate adaptation. Conservationists work to protect biodiversity and rehabilitate damaged ecosystems, while community development practitioners engage local communities in sustainable practices. Urban planners and local government officials integrate environmental considerations into development planning and allocate resources to protect natural assets.

Together, these roles show that addressing environmental challenges requires collaboration across disciplines — and that a qualification related to environmental studies equips you to contribute meaningfully to environmental protection, sustainability, and community resilience in South Africa and beyond.

Understanding environmental careers

Before you start: Why environmental careers?

Before choosing a qualification related to the environment, take some time to reflect on your interests and goals. The questions below can help you think more intentionally about your study and career choices:

- Why are you interested in environmental issues or sustainability?
- Where does this interest come from (personal experience, community issues, global concerns)?
- Where would you like to be in five years? In ten years?
- What kinds of opportunities or contributions do you hope to make through studying in this field?

Environmental careers often attract people who want to make a practical contribution to protecting natural systems while supporting human well-being.

Career options related to the environment

The environmental field offers a wide range of interesting, meaningful, and multidisciplinary career options. Environmental work is rewarding because it contributes to the protection and management of the natural systems that sustain life and support social and economic development.

There are two broad but complementary career routes:

- Social-environmental careers
- Environmental science careers

Effective environmental management usually requires a combination of both perspectives.

SOCIAL-ENVIRONMENTAL CAREERS		
Career path	Related qualifications	Options at Unisa
Community conservation and rural development	BA degree with subjects such as Anthropology, Development Studies and Geography	BA Environmental Management BA General
Environmental education	Education qualification with Geography/Biology or postgraduate environmental education	BA Environmental Management BA General followed by Postgraduate Certificate in Education Bachelor of Education
Environmental law	Law degree with environmental law focus	LLB degree LLM degree
Environmental journalism	Journalism or communication qualification	BA General degree with Languages, Linguistics and Geography BA Communication Science
Environmental communication	Communication Science	BA Communication Science
Eco-tourism	Tourism degree or diploma	BCom degree with specialisation in Tourism Management Diploma & Advanced Diploma in Tourism Management
Cultural and heritage resources	BA degree with subjects such as Archaeology, Anthropology, Politics, Sociology and History	BA General

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE CAREERS		
Environmental science careers usually begin with a science-based qualification. Different science subjects lead to different specialisation areas. • Life sciences (e.g. Zoology, Botany, Ecology) often lead to biodiversity conservation, wildlife management, and environmental monitoring. • Physical sciences (e.g. Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics) are commonly linked to pollution control, waste management, and environmental assessment. • Engineering and planning fields integrate environmental considerations into infrastructure and development projects.		
Career path	Related qualifications	Options at Unisa
Environmental impact assessment & management	BSc degree in life sciences with postgraduate courses in environmental management	BSc with specialisation in Life Sciences BSc with specialisation in Environmental Management
Horticulture	Diploma or degree in horticulture	Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Ornamental Horticulture
Nature conservation	Diploma and Advanced Diploma in nature conservation or BSc Life Sciences (Zoology, Botany, Ecology)	Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Nature Conservation BSc with specialisation in Environmental Management BSc Life Sciences
Specialist biodiversity sciences	Postgraduate degrees in Zoology, Botany and Ecology	BSc Life Sciences
Waste & pollution management	BSc (Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Sciences)	BSc with specialisation in Environmental Management BSc Life Sciences
Environmental engineering	Engineering diploma & advanced diploma	Diploma & Advanced Diploma in Civil or Chemical Engineering

Further reading

- [Green Careers](#)

Skills and qualities are needed in environmental careers

Individuals working in criminology-related fields typically demonstrate:

- Problem-solving and systems thinking
- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Analytical and critical thinking
- Ability to work with data and scientific information
- Attention to detail and accuracy
- Curiosity and a willingness to learn continuously
- Ability to work across disciplines and with diverse stakeholders

- Interest in sustainability, ethics, and environmental justice

Possible job titles

Depending on qualifications and specialisation, graduates may work as:

- Environmental manager or planner
- Environmental impact analyst
- Conservation officer or conservationist
- Environmental educator
- Community development facilitator
- Researcher or lecturer
- GIS specialist or cartographer
- Hydrologist or climatologist
- Ecologist, zoologist, or marine biologist
- Waste management or pollution control specialist
- Environmental consultant
- Urban or regional planner

Job titles often vary across sectors and employers. Focus on skills and functions, not only titles.

Possible work environments

Graduates may find employment in a variety of sectors, including:

- Government departments and municipalities
- Environmental consultancies
- Conservation agencies and parks
- Research institutions and universities
- NGOs and community-based organisations
- Private sector (mining, energy, agriculture, infrastructure)
- Tourism and eco-tourism organisations
- International development and environmental agencies

Environmental careers are not limited to one role or sector. Whether you are interested in science, policy, education, or community development, environmental studies can prepare you for multiple pathways that contribute to sustainability and social well-being.

Exploring and researching careers

Making informed career decisions means going beyond what you already know. Career research helps you explore opportunities, understand what employers are looking for, and identify the steps you can take to prepare yourself.

Try this:

Here are some simple activities to help you explore environmental careers. Choose 2–3 to start with:

- 1. Online search**
Search “careers related to the environment in South Africa” or “entry-level jobs related to the environment” and make a list of the qualifications and skills mentioned.
- 2. Occupational information websites**
Visit the South African Department of Higher Education and Training’s [National Career Advice Portal](#). Search for specific job titles and read about work activities, skills, and job outlook.
- 3. Job search portals**
Check portals like [Indeed](#), [Career Junction](#) or [PNet](#). Type in specific job titles to see which employers are currently hiring and the requirements.
- 4. LinkedIn**
[Search for Unisa alumni](#) who studied in environmental fields to see where they work. What career paths do they follow?
- 5. AI tools**
Use ChatGPT or Google Gemini to ask: “What are emerging careers related to the environment in South Africa?” Compare the results with what you see on job portals.
- 6. Talk to others**
Set up an informal chat with someone working in the field or at an organisation you are interested in to learn more about their career journey and daily work.
- 7. Attend a careers fair**
When Unisa or professional organisations host career fairs, look for employers

related to criminology. Prepare 2–3 questions to ask them about entry routes into the profession.

8. Join a professional organisation or network

Search for professional organisations and networks related to your field of study and career fields.

9. Volunteering

Look for volunteering or vacation work opportunities. Note the skills you develop through these experiences.

Organisations related to environmental careers

Environmental management, sustainability & policy

- [International Association for Impact Assessment – South Africa \(IAIA-SA\)](#)
Relevant for students interested in environmental impact assessment (EIA), environmental management, and policy. Offers conferences, short courses, and networking opportunities.
- [Environmental Assessment Practitioners Association of South Africa \(EAPASA\)](#)
Professional body for environmental assessment practitioners. Useful for students interested in EIAs, environmental consulting, and compliance work.
- [Green Building Council South Africa \(GBCSA\)](#)
Focuses on sustainable building and green infrastructure. Relevant for students interested in sustainability, urban development, and environmental planning.

Conservation, biodiversity & natural resources

- [South African National Biodiversity Institute \(SANBI\)](#)
Key national institution for biodiversity research and conservation. Offers internships, research exposure, and early-career opportunities.
- [Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa \(WESSA\)](#)
Ideal for students interested in environmental education, conservation, and community engagement. Offers volunteering, training, and youth programmes.
- [Endangered Wildlife Trust \(EWT\)](#)
Focuses on wildlife conservation and applied environmental research. Valuable for students interested in biodiversity protection and field-based work.

Environmental science, research & academia

- [Council for Scientific and Industrial Research \(CSIR\)](#)
Conducts applied research in environmental science, climate change, water, and energy. Relevant for students interested in research, innovation, and data-driven environmental solutions.
- [Human Sciences Research Council \(HSRC\)](#)
Works on environmental governance, sustainability, and social-environmental issues. Particularly relevant for students interested in the social-environmental interface.
- [NRF South African Environmental Observation Network](#)
Develops platforms enabling researchers to conduct research for detecting, understanding, and predicting environmental change.

Environmental education & communication

- [Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa \(EEASA\)](#)
Focuses on environmental education, training, and public awareness. Ideal for students interested in teaching, communication, and community education.

Planning, geography & spatial/environmental systems

- [South African Planning Institute \(SAPI\)](#)
Relevant for students interested in urban planning, regional planning, and land use management with environmental considerations.

For more detailed steps and extra activities, see our [Career Research brochure](#).

Preparing while you study

Many students believe that a degree will lead directly to a specific job. In reality, your career path is shaped by more than your major. It is also about the **skills you build, the experiences you gain, and how you prepare along the way**. While you study, there are many things you can do to get ready for opportunities.

Your degree is one part of your career journey. By building skills, gaining experience, keeping a portfolio, and investing in your confidence, you'll be better prepared for opportunities during and after your studies.

Develop your transferable skills

Your studies give you subject knowledge and valuable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, working independently, and adapting to new situations. Reflect on what you're learning and practise explaining these skills in ways that employers will understand.

Activity

- List three skills you've strengthened this year and one example of how you've used each.
- List three skills you intend to strengthen and how you plan on doing so.

Build a career portfolio

A portfolio helps you keep track of your achievements, experiences, and goals. Include your skills, certificates, volunteering, work experience, and career ideas. Over time, this will become a powerful tool for applications and interviews.

Useful resource

- [Unisa Career Portfolio](#)

Gain experience (volunteering or part-time work)

Getting experience outside your coursework helps you explore fields of interest, build networks, and develop workplace skills. Volunteering is especially valuable when done responsibly and with respect for the community.

Think about

- Which organisations could benefit from your skills?
- What could you gain in return (skills, networks, insights)?
- How will this experience link to your career goals?

Enhance your employability

Employability means your ability to get, keep, and grow in fulfilling work. Today's careers are flexible: people change jobs and industries often, and success can mean many different things. You can boost your employability by:

- Managing your personal brand (how others see your professionalism).
- Developing job search skills (CVs, cover letters, interviews, networking).
- Exploring flexible career paths and lifelong learning opportunities.

Useful resources

- [Unisa Prepare for Job Opportunities](#)
- [Counselling and Career Development YouTube channel](#)
- [PNet Grad Pack](#)
- [GradNext](#)

Grow your self-confidence

Believing in your ability to succeed is just as important as skills and knowledge. Low self-confidence can hold you back from studying effectively, applying for opportunities, or connecting with others.

Ways to strengthen your confidence

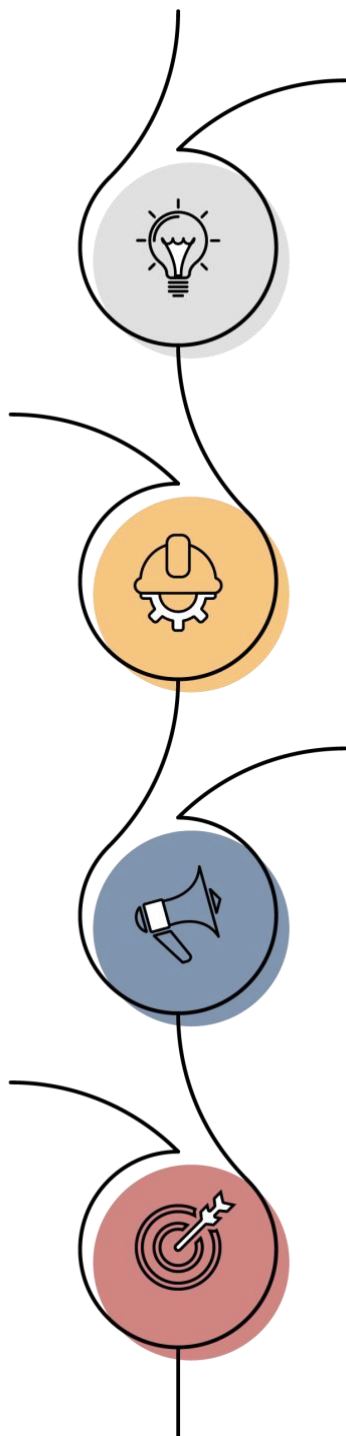
- Focus on your strengths and successes.
- Ask for help when needed: it's a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Practise self-talk that encourages growth instead of fear.

Remember: confidence grows with action. The more you try, the more you'll believe in yourself.

Your roadmap to success

Embarking on a career journey while studying can feel exciting and overwhelming. This roadmap will guide you year by year, helping you to stay intentional, informed, and adaptable.

Careers are rarely straight lines. Think of this roadmap as a flexible guide: you can move between stages depending on your opportunities and goals.



Year 1: Explore and build foundations

- Reflect on your interests, strengths, and career goals.
- Research career paths linked to your qualification.
- Plan your modules and think about postgraduate options.
- Identify key employability skills to develop.
- Create a basic CV and LinkedIn profile.
- Join a student or professional organisation.

Year 2: Grow and gain experience

- Focus on excelling in your studies.
- Apply for internships, part-time jobs, or volunteer work.
- Attend workshops, webinars, or conferences.
- Gain certifications (if relevant).
- Expand your professional network.
- Update your CV and portfolio with new experiences.

Year 3: Refine and specialise

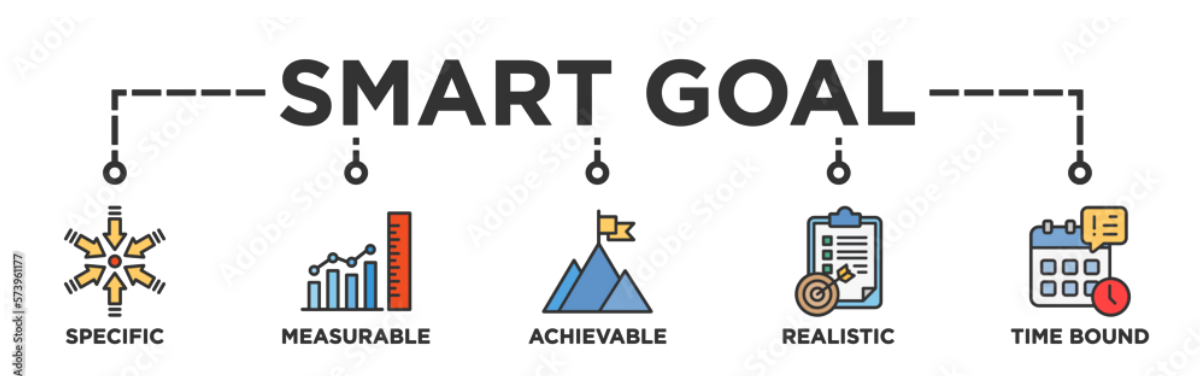
- Revisit your career goals and explore specialisations.
- Connect with alumni and seek mentorship.
- Strengthen your professional presence (LinkedIn, portfolio, personal website).
- Practise with mock interviews and improve communication skills.
- Contribute to professional discussions online or at events.

Final Year: Launch your career

- Start an intentional job search (LinkedIn, job boards, company websites).
- Tailor your CV and cover letters for each application.
- Practise interviews and refine your elevator pitch.
- Attend career fairs and networking events.
- Evaluate and negotiate job offers with guidance from mentors.
- Commit to lifelong learning and professional development.

My career learning plan: Next steps

Your next step is to plan how you will get the information that you still need to make optimal career decisions. Use SMART goals to help you plan your career research.



S – Specific: What exactly do I want to find out?

M – Measurable: How will I know I've done it?

A – Achievable: Can I realistically do this step?

R – Relevant: Does this help me make better career decisions?

T – Time-bound: By when will I do it?

What career questions do I still need answers to?

My career question	What steps will I take?	By when?	Who/what can help me?	Done?	What's next?
E.g. What jobs can I do with a degree related to the environment?	Search LinkedIn profiles of Unisa graduates who have completed different environmental qualifications	15 Oct	LinkedIn, Alumni page	Yes	Connect with 3 alumni

Career planning is not about having all the answers right now. It is about staying curious, setting small goals, and building momentum.

Study opportunities at Unisa

Undergraduate qualifications

- [Higher Certificate in Life and Environmental Sciences \(98366\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Management \(98055\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science in Environmental Management Botany \(98052 - EBO\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science in Environmental Management Chemistry \(98052 - ECH\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science in Environmental Management Zoology \(98052 - EZO\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science General](#)
- [Bachelor of Arts](#)
- [BSc in Life Sciences](#)
- [Diploma](#) and [Advanced Diploma](#) in Nature Conservation
- [Diploma](#) in Ornamental Horticulture and [Advanced Diploma](#) in Ornamental and Landscape Horticulture

If you do not meet the admission requirements for a Bachelor's degree, then you will need to explore the option of applying for a [relevant Higher Certificate](#). Completing a relevant Higher Certificate programme will enable you to meet the requirements for a diploma or degree.

Visit the Unisa website at <http://www.unisa.ac.za/qualifications> for more information about the admission requirements for these degrees.

Postgraduate qualifications

Postgraduate Diploma

- [Postgraduate Diploma in Nature Conservation](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Ornamental and Landscape Horticulture \(90096\)](#)

Honours degrees

- BSc Honours in Environmental Management
- BSc Honours in Environmental Monitoring and Modelling
- [Bachelor of Arts Honours in Environmental Management \(90108\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science Honours in Environmental Management \(98102\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science Honours in Environmental Monitoring and Modelling \(98103\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science Honours in Geography \(98105\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science in Life Sciences \(see list for available specialisations\)](#)

Master's and PhD

- View the [list](#) of available options for Master's and PhD qualifications

Read more about the Research Focus Areas [here](#).

Counselling and career development services at Unisa

The Unisa Directorate for Counselling and Career Development offers career, academic, and personal counselling services to Unisa students and the broader community. You can talk to a counsellor about:

- **Career decisions.** I am not sure which career path to follow; I don't know which qualification would be best; I want to change my career direction...
- **Career information.** How can I find out more about a career in ...
- **Employability.** How do I market myself to employers? How can I look for work? How can I compile an effective CV? How do I go about networking with others? How do I put together my career portfolio? How can I meet potential employers? How can I improve my interview skills?)
- **My studies at Unisa.** How can I get started with my studies? How do I plan my studies? How can I study more effectively? I don't feel motivated to continue with my studies... I feel worried about preparing for/ writing the exams. I failed my exams – what now? I need to improve my reading/ writing/ numeracy skills
- **Personal issues and mental health.** How can I have better relationships with others? How can I cope more effectively with issues that impact my studies?

Contact us

- Send an email to counselling@unisa.ac.za.
- Make an appointment to see a counsellor:
 - [In-person at a Unisa Centre](#)
 - [Online \(on MS Teams\)](#)

Further self-help resources for career, academic and personal development

Our website: www.unisa.ac.za/counselling

Our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/unisacareers