

# Second Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Learning a resounding success

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) hosted its second Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Learning on Friday, 14 September 2018, at the Richards Bay Campus.

The awards are a way of acknowledging the exceptional performance of staff members in teaching, curriculum innovation, community engagements and support services, which are aligned with the University's vision about social and technological innovations in delivering quality education in the higher education landscape. Candidates are self-nominated or nominated by peers or students in three categories namely, the emerging academic, developed academic and distinguished academic.

In the Emerging Academic category, Nontobeko Prudence Khumalo took the award, receiving an amount of R50 000. Prof Unathi Kolanisi, the Head of the Department of Consumer Science snatched the Distinguished Academic award and also received a R50 000 cash prize.

"My sincere congratulations to all the nominees of the Vice Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. You can be exceptionally proud of your achievements. Thank you for your outstanding contribution to UNIZULU and thank you for giving to our students," UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor Prof Xoliswa Mtose said to the awardees.

On her recognition, Prof Kolanisi, who joined the university in 2016, said she felt honoured, adding that she was grateful to Prof Mtose for the wonderful job she was doing to promote academic excellence. "When I told my colleagues (emerging academics) and students about the awards, they all said it is an inspiration to them. Imagine if 80% of the academics and students were feeling like that every day?" she reckoned.

Prof Kolanisi employs unorthodox teaching and learning methods which have significantly improved the Consumer Science programme. Her teaching philosophy is founded



From left: UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor Professor Xoliswa Mtose with Professor Unathi Kolanisi, Head of the Consumer Science Department and recipient of Distinguished Academic award and Dr Sithembiso Ngubane, Curriculum Development Specialist from the Teaching and Learning Centre.

on a complementary combination of the Problem-based Learning (PBL) and Transformative Learning (TL) pedagogies, a strategic learning approach that teaches students how to learn rather than what to learn or learning how to be taught.

"The (pedagogies) are based on ensuring that students are encouraged and given opportunities to accept responsibility for their learning. It is important and valuable for facilitators of learning to ensure that students do not learn to reproduce knowledge (but are equipped) to be real life problem solvers. Therefore, the combination of PBL and TL go beyond the acquisition of knowledge but stimulate the development of critical thinking and analytical skills, subsequently promoting autonomous thinking that encourages self-

actualisation and compassion for society," Prof Kolanisi elaborated.

Her ultimate aspiration is to produce well-rounded graduates who are ready for the workplace but are also job creators. That is why a portion of her R50 000 prize will go towards supporting honours students to efficiently run the cocktail bar in the Consumer Science Department as part of their Food Service Management module. The experience is intended to develop the students' business management skills while teaching them to deal with real life issues in their field.

Also a firm believer of "learning with communities", the academic has taken strides to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into the Consumer Science curriculum. In 2017, her department produced a savoury biscuit with extracts of imbuya (Amaranthus), an indigenous plant with multiple

nutritional benefits. Other products such as rusks, bread, pesto, two-minute noodles and quiche have also been developed. The department is currently working on the nutrition analysis, consumer acceptability and shelf life of the product. This process will be followed by commercialisation.

Learning of her accomplishments, one could easily be led to believe that becoming a lecturer was Prof Kolanisi's childhood dream. Growing up in eMakhanda (formerly Grahamstown) in the Eastern Cape, the academic said she was adamant that she would not follow in her parents' footsteps. Fate had alternative plans though because today, Prof Kolanisi admits that what fuels her passion for teaching is her "love for the African child".

She is quick to clarify though that her husband and son, Mpho and Nare Mabotha, give her purpose to live.



UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor Professor Xoliswa Mtose handing over a R50 000 cheque to Nontobeko Prudence Khumalo, a lecturer in the Department of Arts and Languages, who won in the Emerging Academic category. Khumalo joined UNIZULU in 2009 where she was a Learning Programme Coordinator before joining the Faculty of Education in 2013. She believes that the aim of teaching is to facilitate learning and for effective learning to take place there needs to be a conducive and supportive environment. She therefore decided to become a change agent in her own classroom and transform the way she viewed teaching and learning. Her belief is that deep and meaningful learning can take place when students are at the centre of the process. She has been teaching students both in the undergraduate and postgraduate levels from 2013 to date. Khumalo is pursuing her PhD in Curriculum Studies at the University of South Africa. Her research interests are in academic literacy and teacher education.

## Community engagement should drive all research, UNIVEN academic

IT is high time for academics to start appreciating the essential role of community engagement in research production, Professor Vhonani Netshandama, the Director of Community Engagement at the University of Venda, said during her recent lecture at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

Held on Monday, 10 September, at UNIZULU's KwaDlangezwa Campus, Prof Netshandama's guest lecture marked the first of a series of events which took place as part of the university's annual Research Week. Titled *Understanding community engagement in higher education*, Prof Netshandama's lecture unpacked the essence of community engagement within a higher education setting.

"Community engagement in higher education is about the development of the scholarship of reciprocal knowledge," explained Prof Netshandama, further emphasising that it is futile to conduct research if it cannot, in the long run, benefit society or positively impact social issues. She challenged her fellow scholars to no longer be content with conducting research which results in unanswered questions. "PhD research should no longer be about asking questions but rather finding solutions to real-life issues," she stressed.

She emphasised, however, that community engagement should not be confused with community outreach, which involves philanthropic deeds.

In order to devise impactful solutions to socioeconomic issues, there needs to be an exchange of knowledge between university partners and the community, Prof Netshandama said. "Community knowledge exchange aims to take an active approach to problem solving which achieves the best outcomes for



Professor Vhonani Netshandama, the Director of Community Engagement at the University of Venda, delivering her guest lecture on *Understanding community engagement in higher education* during the UNIZULU Research Week.

both community and university partners," she added.

She concluded by urging researchers to be cognisant of the fact that their knowledge is not necessarily superior to that of the communities in which they conduct research. "Be humble to the understanding that there are multiple knowledge (systems) out there," she said.

## UNIZULU talks climate change at Science Café launch

THE Research and Innovation Office at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) hosted its very first Science Café, a platform for UNIZULU experts to have dialogue on matters of science, during the annual UNIZULU Research Week which took place from 10 to 14 September.

The debate revolved around understanding climate change and its impact on the environment, people and food security. Members of the support and academic staff as well as students participated in the conversation.

According to Mammusa Lekoa, the Community Engagement Manager, the objective of a science café is to make science less intimidating to lay people, ignite public interest in science and create an atmosphere where the public can not only learn from scientists, but scientists can learn from the public as well.

"Scientists have a responsibility to communicate the findings of their research, but we have an even greater responsibility to engage with the general

public, and that in a language that everyone can understand. This is to increase UNIZULU's relevance in the community," Lekoa said.

According to Lester van Wyk, a Generalist in the Human Resources Department, participating in the science café was "very interesting".

"The topic that was discussed regarding climate change really opened my eyes and gave me insight into the seriousness of state our atmosphere is in and that we as humans are killing Earth day by day. Yes, it is not too late for us to make a positive change to preserve the atmosphere and to really take care of our immediate environment. I would really like to see more activities at UNIZULU to encourage the minimisation of greenhouse gases," Van Wyk said.

Khethukuthula Gwala, who is studying towards an honours degree in Geography, said taking part in the science café gave her a better understanding of global warming and climate change.



Mammusa Lekoa, Community Engagement Manager, moderating the dialogue during the first Science Café organised by the Research and Innovation Office. The debate was well attended by students and academics alike.