



THE MERCURY

TERTIARY Ψ π TIMES

Gaudeamus igitur
Annues dum sumus
Fuit uis munda
Fuit uis est
Nos habebit munda

UNIZULU Academic heads first IGU commission in Africa

UNIZULU boasts having one of its academic staff members, Dr Innocent Moyo from the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, as the founding Chairman of the International Geographical Union (IGU) commission on African Studies.

A prestigious international, non-governmental and professional body, IGU is devoted to developing the discipline of geography. The core functions are to promote geography through initiating and coordinating geographical research and teaching in countries all around the world. The body is comprised of national committees, commissions and task forces which implement its mandate.

Until May 2017, IGU had never had a commission in Africa since its inception 95 years ago. However, through the initiative of Dr Moyo and University of Pretoria academic, Dr Christopher Nshimbi, the continent is finally represented in the organisation. Together, the academics drafted and submitted a proposal to the IGU in December 2016, which was re-



Dr Innocent Moyo, UNIZULU academic and Chairman for IGU on African Studies.

viewed and finally approved in May 2017.

"I realised something needed to be done by African geographers. We had scholars from

other parts of the world conducting research on African issues before, but I always felt that there was a great need for African researchers to rise to

the occasion," Dr Moyo said.

The IGU Commission on African Studies comprises of African and Africanist (even non-Africans with a keen interest) scholars, who are dedicated to advancing scholarship on issues on or about African geography and cognate disciplines. These, according to Dr Moyo, are issues that include but are not limited to the exploitation and management of Africa's natural resources, poverty, disease, industrialisation and urbanisation, population and climate change.

As Chairman, Dr Moyo leads a steering committee which is made up of members from Benin, Ivory Coast, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and the United Kingdom. He also ensures successful implementation of the commission's various programmes and activities.

Among the objectives of the body is, entrenching African researchers in activities of the African commission to eventually grow and expand geographical research in Africa, as well as the development of a journal to publish papers conducted by

African and Africanist geographers.

"Research is about responding to societal needs so we need to ask ourselves how we as geographers can contribute to solutions that try to respond to issues affecting society. We need to understand the role of geography and contribute to impacting society. We can contribute to government policy refinement, however for that to happen, research has to be conducted," he said.

The commission will also hold thematic conferences where critical geographical topics will be discussed. The first of these meetings is scheduled for May 2018, at the University of Namibia.

Scholars will be presenting papers under the theme: Africa's Response to Global Challenges: Understanding Drivers of Poverty and Reducing Inequality.

"This is the time for African geographers to make a very significant mark in the activities of IGU because more than ever before, there is a commission dedicated to doing just that," Dr Moyo concluded.

Conserving marine life

UNIZULU postgraduate students, Siyabonga Nkomo and Nelisiwe Manukuza, are on a mission to help protect marine life and ensure the preservation of the marine aquatic system.

The pair is currently studying towards their Honours degrees in Zoology with a keen interest in Marine Biology.

These bright postgraduates were recently selected to participate in the Ocean Stewards programme which consists of a network of established marine scientists. This network includes Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife as well as the South African Institute for African Biodiversity. The students were welcomed on board the Angra Pequena, a research vessel that works on the coastline of Durban and Richards Bay. Sponsored by Grindrod, NRE, Blue Fund, Wildlands and Sea Quests, the programme focuses on offshore marine research and conservation such as the plethora of fish communities, reefs and was also started with the hopes of attracting more students into marine conservation. For Nkomo, the expedition was an informative experience which provided him with the hands-on skills required in the Marine Biology field.

"The third and fourth days of the programme were very pro-



Zoology postgraduate students Siyabonga Nkomo (centre) and Nelisiwe Manukuza (right) were recently selected to participate in the Ocean Stewards programme.

ductive. We were grouped and dispatched in various stations. Our primary activity was deploying specialised equipment such as Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROV) and Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems (BRUVS) deep into the oceans. We collected the data and stored it accordingly," he said.

The programme also seeks to address specific conservation of offshore habitats and ecosystems, therefore averting the continued degradation of offshore environmental re-

sources and contributing to the recovery of impacted biodiversity habitats and fish species conservation.

According to Manukuza, initiatives such as the Ocean Stewards programme are necessary in order to observe and monitor contributing factors that endanger fish species such as Zebra Fish, Spider Fish and Long Tail Fish as well as the Gulper Eels. With the data collected, scientists know how to implement suitable methods of conservation.

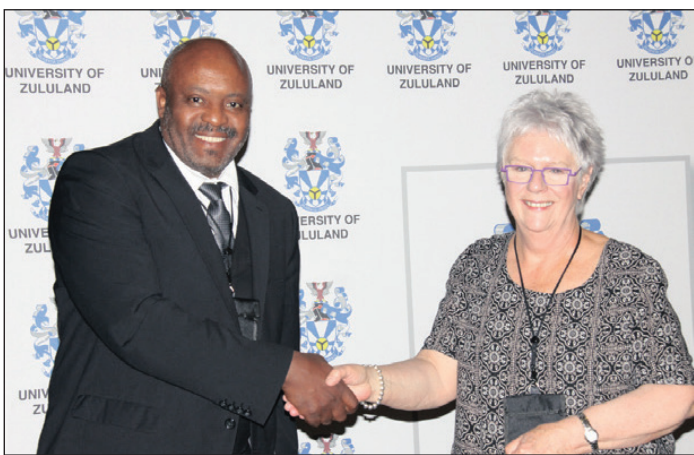
Dissecting issues related to Africanising higher education

AFTER the success of its 2016 Teaching and Learning Conference, the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) once again held this significant conference with a focus on Africanisation of Teaching and Learning: Creativity, Innovation, Invention, Information and Communication Technologies and Student Participation.

The conference, held over three days, acknowledged the critical importance of national debates on africanisation and decolonisation of higher education. The debate has been significant and relevant since the 2015 #feesmustfall movement.

Presenters at the conference framed and focused their presentations in highlight of UNIZULU's historically and predominantly disadvantaged background. Dr Yasmin Rugbeer, the Director in the Vice-chancellor's office at UNIZULU, gave an opening address on behalf of the Vice-chancellor, Professor Xoliswa Mtsose. Rugbeer said the University has made significant strides in realising its vision of becoming a leading comprehensive university providing quality education and wishes to cast its attention on curriculum transformation within the African context.

"Africanisation is seen as an approach of surpassing individual identities in a quest for cohesion as well as a way of acknowledging and accepting



Professor Sandile Songca, deputy Vice-chancellor: Teaching and Learning at the University of Zululand with Dr Chrissie Boughey, Deputy Vice-chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs at Rhodes University

'otherness'. Africanisation can be understood as the adaptation of the subject matter with teaching methods geared to the physical and cultural realities of the cultural environment. By doing this, we might be able to form an association with the broader African experience and this would assist us in the designing curricular that knit us together. The institution will now focus on curriculum transformation within the African context. We need to develop meaningful curricular," said Dr Rugbeer.

Sibusiso Mchunu, the Dean of Students at the University, spoke about the advantages of a co-curricular programme for students, saying that students are partners in the learning process and they don't enrol

into higher education for academics only.

"Learning is not merely an academic pursuit. The whole university environment should be a learning environment. The greatest impact appears to stem from reinforcing academic interpersonal involvement that is relevant to the particular educational outcome," he said.

Professor Sandile Songca, Deputy Vice-chancellor invited academics to initiate activities that will reflect on their teaching.

"We can't take our teaching for granted as if it is business as usual. It is a space for innovation. We need to start doing things better and differently. Students also need to come forward and take part in their learning," he said.

Dismantling barriers faced by students with disabilities

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) hosted a symposium on disabilities in an effort to empower and inspire its students living with disabilities.

The symposium was organised by the UNIZULU Student Services Department (SSD) under the theme, *Access and Success for All*, in keeping with the University's values on the promotion of diversity as well as its commitment to creating equal opportunities for all students.

Both abled and disabled students formed part of the conversation. Sibusiso Mchunu, UNIZULU's Dean of Students, pointed out that the South African Constitution stipulates that all citizens should be respected regardless of colour, race, social status or background, adding that the number of students with disabilities has hugely increased at the University.

"One has to acknowledge the fact that the institution lags behind when it comes to accommodating students with disabilities. However, we walk this road as we build it and we cannot be perfect at this stage. The fact of the matter is that we have started and will get there soon with the efforts



UNIZULU student, Lastborn Khayalake Nxele, speaks at the Zululand Symposium on Disabilities.

from different colleagues and sections within the institution. That means that we are really committed to seeing that students with disabilities are accommodated at this University," said Mchunu.

Executive Director of Institutional Planning, Nhlanhla Cele, said that all students, regardless of their ability, should have a sense of belong-

ing at the University.

"Students, as well as members of staff with challenges, should be perceived as people in the world not as people with disabilities. We should deal with issues of discrimination as part of institutional culture and also educate the entire university community about such issues," he said.

Dr Anlia Pretorius from the

Disability Rights Unit at Wits University said several South African universities still have a long way to go in improving access for students with disabilities.

"Having said that, it's important to acknowledge that South Africa has come a long way and that more and more students are finding it a possibility to go and further their

education. It's important to ensure that students are not only supported with their formal university or institutional programme, but also in social and sporting activities. We still find it very difficult to manage with that because people are just not 'thinking disability' and it's important to see disability as part of transformation," she said.

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