

Vice-Chancellor's public lecture focuses on governing concepts for Afrocentric pedagogy

SBAHLE DUMAKUDE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU), in its pursuit of being a fully-fledged node for African thought, invited Professor Molefi Kete Asante to address and engage with its scholars during the final instalment of the Vice-Chancellor's public lecture / webinar series.

The topic of the public lecture was "Governing Concepts for an Afrocentric Pedagogy".

Prof Asante is a distinguished professor fondly referred to as "the father of Afrocentricity" – a theory he developed in the 1980s. He is a leading figure in the fields of African-American studies, African studies and communication studies. He is a professor in the Department of Africology at Temple University in Philadelphia and the President of the Molefi Asante Institute for Afrocentric Studies.

UNIZULU's Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Xoliswa Mtose delivered the official opening address and set the tone for fruitful engagements that transpired during the lecture.

"As a part of my introduction about two years ago at the inaugural conference to launch the vision of developing UNIZULU as a node for African thought, we declared this project was a way of becoming an intersection of African scholarship that privileges the rich history, culture and agency of people of African descent – regardless of where they are in the world," Prof Mtose said.

She added that launching the vision to be a node for African thought necessitated the need to assist with the task of re-orientating and rejuvenating knowledge. "The significance of focusing on African thought has been succinctly captured by Professor Seepe when he said 'Universities in Africa have tended to mimic Western scholarship rather than reconfigure the higher education sphere into a wonderland of authentic African centrality'."

In his presentation, Prof Asante highlighted that Africans have emulated many Western practices. "First of all, my recognition of Hatshepsut, Amanirensis, Amina of Zaria and Wangari Maathai – these are the names of the great women of our past who were exorcists. The fact that we have not heard of them is sometimes an indication that we have, in fact, embarked so much of Europe that if I were to speak to you of Queen Elizabeth and Joan of Arc, you would say 'I know [them]'."

Prof Asante added that the foundation of Western knowledge was the root of issues facing Africans. He elaborated that while Greece and Rome are at the edge of Western knowledge, Africans are the very ancestors of humanity and that philosophy has its roots in Africa.

Professor Byron Brown, Director of Research and Innovation, was the respondent. He commended Prof Asante for delivering a thought-provoking presentation.



From left: Professor Molefi Kete Asante, guest speaker; Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal; and Professor Siphon Seepe, Higher Education and Strategy Consultant.

HASSIC FOCUSES ON UBUNTU IN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Participants of the 15th Humanities and Social Sciences International Conference hosted by UNIZULU. | James Thwala

NOMVELO XULU

THE Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently hosted the highly successful 15th Humanities and Social Sciences International Conference (HASSIC) at Umfolozi Hotel Casino Convention Resort.

The two-day event was themed "Problematising Ubuntu as a critical project in the humanities and social sciences: Towards healing and well-being of communities". It brought together

esteemed international scholars to engage in a fruitful discussion and presentations on the significance of Ubuntu in addressing societal challenges.

The event's success underscores Strategic Goal 1 of UNIZULU's Vision 2027, which speaks to developing the

distinctiveness of UNIZULU as an African university by establishing it as a key node for African thought; ensuring that its curricula reflect African issues and perspectives, and cultivating excellence in African languages and cultural and social studies.

UNIZULU FSAE 2024 annual postgraduate symposium



Picture: James Thwala

PAMELA MLABA

THE Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (FSAE) at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently held its annual postgraduate symposium at KwaDlangezwa Campus. Themed "Advancing Science through Multidisciplinary and Afrocentric Approaches", the symposium aimed to showcase how multidisciplinary scientific approaches have addressed or are addressing the current challenges faced by Africa and the world.

According to Professor Innocent Moyo, FSAE Acting Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation, multidisciplinary research is essential for advancing scientific understanding and addressing complex global challenges. He highlighted the importance of collaboration across various fields; urging participants to embrace diverse perspectives and expertise. He expressed his hope that the conference would foster meaningful discussions and inspire innovative ideas.

"Participants are encouraged to develop guidelines and recommendations regarding these global societal issues. I would like to wish you a fruitful and productive conference," Prof Moyo said.

The symposium attracted a diverse array of guest speakers who participated both virtually and in person. Among the keynote speakers was Prof Francesco

Petrucione, Director of the National Institute for Theoretical and Computational Sciences at Stellenbosch University.

Prof Petrucione discussed the latest advancements in theoretical and computational methodologies, emphasising their importance in solving complex scientific problems. He also focused on recent collaborations that have bridged disciplines – showcasing how computational tools can enhance our understanding of quantum mechanics and other advanced topics.

In true symposium fashion, the event also saw multiple presentations by other esteemed researchers, including UNIZULU postgraduate students who explored various fields, including data science, environmental studies and biomedical research. Panel discussions provided a platform for interactive dialogue between attendees and speakers about emerging trends and challenges in science. The variety of topics presented by the UNIZULU students not only enriched the symposium, but also emphasised the vital role of emerging researchers in advancing scientific knowledge.

As a parting shot, the organising committee shared an Albert Einstein quote with the participants: "The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination". This sentiment encapsulated the spirit of the symposium, which promoted creativity and collaboration in advancing scientific knowledge.

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Historic co-operation signing between UNIZULU and Chang'an University

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) and Chang'an University recently signed a memorandum of co-operation. The two institutions were represented by Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal, and Professor Fan Wen, Vice-President of Chang'an University.

The signing of the memorandum is a culmination and consolidation of many academic interactions and co-operation between Professor Vetrumurugan Elumalai, Head of Hydrology Department at UNIZULU, and Professor Peiyue Li of Chang'an University. Both professors are distinguished leaders in the field of hydrology and hydrogeology.

Rock solid foundation

This partnership is significant in that it is grounded in scholarships. During the signing, Professor Wen referred to the journey that has been travelled by the two universities.

"Chang'an University and the University of Zululand have a long history of collaboration. In 2017, the two universities were granted the China-South Africa joint research project funded by the National Natural Science Foundation of China and the National Research Foundation of South Africa – for which Li and Elumalai are the principal investigators. Based on this joint research project, the two universities have obtained fruitful achievements in collaboration.

"In the past five years, researchers

from the universities have collaborated in publishing more than 20 journal articles, one book, co-organised five international conferences, co-supervised more than 10 Masters and PhD students, and have had four scholarly exchanges," he said.

The collaboration between UNIZULU's Hydrology department and the School of Water and Environment also enjoys the support of their respective national governments. Incidentally, the signing of the memorandum follows closely on the state visit by President Cyril Ramaphosa to the People's Republic of China. It resulted in the elevation of bilateral ties between China and South Africa to an all-round strategic co-operative partnership.

Against this background, the signing of the memorandum of co-operation ticks all the important boxes. It is scholastically grounded, enjoys institutional support and has the backing of both governments. There is much at stake with such a multi-pronged collaboration. Fortunately, the work is led by individuals with unimpeachable records.

Prof Mtose expressed her appreciation for the support that Chang'an University has provided to Professor Li and Professor Elumalai. She indicated that due to her schedule, she was unable to honour the invitation to the signing.

Prof Elumalai used the occasion to provide an update regarding the nature and extent of research collaboration

with Chang'an University. In his description of the nature of collaboration, he touched on four strategic areas.

The first was the importance of student and faculty exchanges. The productive collaboration led to student exchange programmes between the two universities. This enabled students to undertake joint research work and participate in the presentation of their work.

The second strategic area of collaboration saw the two institutions co-hosting major international conferences. The success rate has been phenomenal, as evidenced by the range of countries represented and the number of papers that have been delivered. Participants come from areas that are separated by five different time zones – from the east to the west, including the global south.

Moreover, the mark of scholarship is measured by the number of publications. In a short space of time, the collaboration has produced no less than 20 peer reviewed articles in reputed journals. In addition, the two lead investigators have ensured that conference proceedings are also published.

Furthermore, as part of the future projects, the lead investigators are hard at work in establishing the International Research Centre for Water Science and Technology. Plans to co-host another international conference on water and environmental sciences in 2025 are in the advanced stages. The conference will be held in Durban, South Africa.



Prof Fan Wen, Vice-President of Chang'an University with Prof Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal. | Supplied



From left: Prof Peiyue Li, Chang'an University; Prof Fan Wen, Vice-President of Chang'an University; Prof Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal; and Prof Vetrumurugan Elumalai, Head of Hydrology Department at UNIZULU. | Supplied

UNIZULU's Dr Fish recognised for physics education excellence

NALEDI HLEFANE

DOCTOR Derek Fish, a physics enthusiast who has been the director of the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) Science Centre for the past 32 years, was recently honoured with the Education Award by the South African Institute of Physics (SAIP).

According to SAIP, the award is a recognition of Dr Fish's "sustained commitment and excellence in physics education through selflessly supporting and contributing to the efforts of the SAIP to improve, support, pioneer and entrench best practices and suitable methods of teaching and learning of physics in South Africa".

Dr Fish explained that to be considered for this award, he had to be nominated by someone in SAIP. He was then contacted by the institute for details of his contributions to physics education in South Africa.

Elated, he described his recognition as a great honour which has reassured him of the impact and appreciation of his efforts in the Science Centre for the past three decades. This was also a full circle moment for him – in 1999 he received the SAIP Silver Jubilee Award for being the most outstanding young physicist in South Africa. In retrospect, Dr Fish acknowledged that receiving that award early in his career fuelled his passion to impart physics knowledge to children visiting the UNIZULU Science Centre.

"I have spent this time making science accessible and fun for more than half a million children – mostly from disadvantaged rural schools. The best memories I have are of teachers, engineers, doctors and others now employed



Dr Derek Fish with one of his past pupils, Jabulani Sibiyi, who is now Principal of Nkosiyethu Primary School in Nongoma. Sibiyi first visited the UNIZULU Science Centre 30 years ago and recently took his Grade 3 learners there. | Supplied

in the sciences relating how coming to the UNIZULU Science Centre 20 or more years ago inspired them to follow their

current careers. I have also been privileged to present science shows all over the world, which is a great joy."



Dr Derek Fish. | Samkele Sokhela

Love for physics

Dr Fish credits his parents for exposing him to science and thereby sparking his curiosity in the field. He also had great teachers at school who further encouraged him to pursue a career in the sciences. It was at the University of Cape Town where his love for physics developed, as he had "wonderful lecturers" who constantly challenged and inspired him.

He began his fulfilling tenure at the UNIZULU Science Centre in October 1992, following a short stint as a trainee maths and science teacher at a high school in East London, in the Eastern Cape. However, retirement is certainly not on the cards yet for Dr Fish. When that time comes, he hopes to "leave a robust four-decade old UNIZULU Science Centre which can continue to inspire future generations".

UNIZULU's Prof Revaprasadu becomes KZN's first B2 NRF-rated chemist



Professor Neerish Revaprasadu, senior professor in UNIZULU's Department of Chemistry. | Samkele Sokhela

PROFESSOR Neerish Revaprasadu, a highly productive scholar and senior professor in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), recently earned a B2 rating by the National Research Foundation (NRF) – a first for chemists in KwaZulu-Natal.

NRF describes B-rated researchers as individuals whose recent research outputs are internationally recognised by their peers for being of high quality and having great impact. The B2

sub-category indicates that "all or the overriding majority of reviewers are firmly convinced that the applicant enjoys considerable international recognition for the high quality and impact of his/her recent research outputs".

Prof Revaprasadu, who has been heaped with praise by his peers for most of his career, is also among the world's top 2% researchers. This is according to the Stanford University World's Top 2% Scientists list in 2022.

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