

2019 Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards Dinner

Address: Professor Sibongile Muthwa, Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University

10 September 2019

Introduction & Greeting

Deputy Vice-Chancellors
Executive Deans and members of university management
The professoriate and academic staff
Professional and support services staff
Award recipients - who are our honoured guests tonight
Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this year's awards, where we recognise and celebrate excellence. Tonight we are making history. For the first time, we celebrate the achievement of our academic and professional support staff at this integrated event. This completes us as the university family, working together in our respective roles to achieve our shared vision and mission.

This evening offers us the opportunity to celebrate our achievements in the past year across all sectors of our University. These inspirational stories are told in the Excellence Awards publication on your tables. This is a keepsake for you, and a reminder to each of us of our individual agency in "changing the world" in living the legacy of our University's namesake, Nelson Mandela.

Research indicates that employee rewards and recognition have a significant and positive effect on employee performance (Hussain, Khaliq, Nisar, Kamboh, & Ali, (2019). Employees respond to appreciation expressed through **recognition** of their good work because it confirms that their work is valued by others. When employees and their work are valued, their satisfaction and productivity rises, and they are motivated to maintain or improve their good work (Whillans, 2019).

Yes, cash matters in people's lives, but it's not all that matters, says Whillans. He researches what makes people happy and found that what really matters in the workplace is that of enabling employees to feel appreciated.

PASS Award Recipients

I wish to start by congratulating our PASS award recipients who have - both as individuals and collectively as teams - excelled in their respective areas of work. It is a great pleasure to recognise your dedication and commitment and to thank you for your outstanding work. The success of the academy is enabled and flourishes on the back of excellent quality support services.

Central to excellence is leadership and followership that imbues the values of the University in providing quality service essential to sustaining and driving a student-centred orientation in the manner we conceptualise, plan and execute our work. It takes deliberate leadership and organisational support for employees to give of their best and blossom in their work. I

therefore salute the supervisors of all the nominees for their people management capability which has enabled their teams to excel.

Learning and Teaching Award Recipients

I now turn to acknowledging our Learning and Teaching award recipients.

The teaching portfolios of this year's (and previous years') winners serve as evidence of sustained records of high standards of teaching and continued outstanding contributions in innovative approaches to enhance student learning. This is particularly so when it comes to using a variety of tools, including digital learning designs.

The strides made are indicative of putting into practise principles that are espoused in the University's Learning and Teaching Policy; which promotes appropriately designed, relevant curricula, and delivery of learning and assessment practices that foster student success.

Furthermore, research informed pedagogies that take into consideration students' needs and aspirations are positive contributions towards meaningful learning. It is therefore imperative for the institution to invest time and resources in professional development initiatives over and above the funding that comes from the Universities Capacity Development Grant provided by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

While we acknowledge the excellent work and sterling contributions of our academics, it is also important to strive for better heights. This can be done by continuous and conscious reflections on teaching practices and in clearly articulating the scholarly nature and aspects of our approaches. In so doing, we will improve our contributions in the scholarship of learning and teaching and quell unfounded perceptions that research at universities tends to get more prominence than teaching and learning.

As a comprehensive institution, we value and appreciate all aspects of the academy. The National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers (Nov 2018) acknowledges that "the work of an academic involves being a teacher and a researcher - these roles should not be in competition. Both are equally important and interdependent, and need to be developed, valued, rewarded and incentivised. Teaching must be research-informed" (pg6).

Our award selection process takes this into consideration. Candidates, in their teaching portfolio, articulate their teaching philosophies and give evidence of the scholarly nature of their teaching. This, in essence, acknowledges the integration of research into teaching.

Research Award Recipients

Allow me to turn to Research, Innovation and Engagement award recipients who will be recognised this evening. These stories are presented in the Research and Innovation Report, together with other institutional achievements over the past year. The Report, which we are launching this evening, showcases and recognises the research and innovation achievements of the institution.

With the Mandela Centenary celebrations continuing well into 2019, the Report has been appropriately themed: "The University in Service of Society". We have taken special care to highlight research and innovation stories that respond to the institutional strategic priorities including:

- Revitalisation of the Humanities,
- Our intentional transdisciplinary focus, and

- Growing the University's African footprint.

We also shine the spotlight on research:

- In service of less resourced communities;
- the work of our research chairs and entities; and
- in pursuit of the institutional research themes.

We have recently approved our research and innovation strategy; and developed our new internationalisation strategy. We are working hard on the associated implementation plans; all part of our organisational redesign; which is taking the university forward in establishing a vibrant research, innovation and internationalisation culture.

This year, we have made great strides in revitalising the Humanities. In addition to the excellent work being done by SACO, CriSHET, CANRAD and others, the launch of our Centre for Philosophy in Africa was a significant milestone this year. We also plan to launch our Centre for Women and Gender studies later this year.

A further innovation is the awarding of the SARCHI Chair in Post School Education and Training: Community and Worker Education, the first to be co-hosted by two South African universities: through a partnership between our Centre for Integrated Post-School Education & Training (CIPSET) and the University of Johannesburg's Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT).

The new International Research Laboratory (IRL) is another first; focused on innovative research and training at the confluence of conservation and sustainability science. It is situated on our George Campus and is a collaboration with the CNRS (the French National Research Centre) and the University of Lyon.

Two major international ocean sciences conferences were held at Nelson Mandela University in March this year: the Second International Indian Ocean Expedition (IIOE-2) and the South Africa–Norway Research Co-operation on Blue Economy, Climate Change, the Environment and Sustainable Energy (SANOCEAN). The IIOE-2 selected Nelson Mandela University to be the hub for marine robotics in a Western Indian Ocean-wide research network, and in March 2019 our Faculty of Engineering, the Built Environment and Information Technology (EBEIT) launched its transdisciplinary Marine Robotics Unit, enabling oceanographic researchers to collect data in situ, using robotic technologies.

We continue to develop our early career researchers as holistic academics. One of our early career researchers is Dr Alistair Potts and in two days' time (12 September) he will be awarded the NRF's P-rating. This is the highest research accolade awarded by the science council to researchers under the age of 35. It is in recognition of outstanding research potential to be a future international leader in a chosen field. Congratulations Dr Potts.

We are currently hosting 63 postdoctoral fellows, compared to 52 in 2017. They significantly contribute to the university in terms of publication outputs, postgraduate supervision and general research productivity. In 2018 our postdoctoral fellows published over 50 peer-reviewed papers.

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to salute all our award recipients, and in doing this, emphasize again the importance of reframing the relationship between science and humanities, and reiterate our ambition to work beyond disciplinary borders to evolve a scholarship that will truly *change the world*.

Congratulations and enjoy the rest of the evening.

I thank you.