

2012 women of the year

This year's winners of the Women of the Year awards are powerful, empowering, and fearless in the face of adversity; they are change agents, mentors, scholars, intellectuals, scientists, ambassadors and public leaders; they are committed to social justice and gender empowerment; they are passionate, hardworking and courageous; they are...



Dr Genevieve James

Dr Genevieve Lerina James, Executive Assistant in the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, won the Gender Activism – Advocacy and Promotion of Women's Rights award

Motivation behind Dr James' nomination

Dr James is an exceptional scholar and activist, described as one of Unisa's "foremost ambassadors", building incredible good will through internal and external sustainable partnerships. The candidate courageously facilitates access to the power of knowledge using a "liberation pedagogical" approach and positively impacts on the lives of citizens in marginal communities, accessing remote and "unsafe" areas.

Her interventions are empowering, respectful of the lived realities of citizens immersed in poverty, drug addiction, crime and despair, and impacts on the lives of women heading up households singlehandedly. Giving "hope" and improving the quality of lives is tangible and practical, as income generation skills and increased employability are direct outcomes of her efforts. With the support of her team, which includes Chevaan Peters, Vuyokazi Maliwa and Rose Mashaba, the Chance 2 Advance programme which she directs has rolled out across 5 provinces.

Her professional integrity and personal passion, conviction, energy and resolve are also noted as exceptional qualities which have enabled major and sustainable achievements with a modest budget. Project staff capacity has been built to sustain the quality and reach of the intervention. Her contribution is inspirational in terms of demonstrating how Unisa as an ODL institution can participate in scaled-up community development.

Her track record also provides evidence of the restoration of human dignity and visibly championing women and children's rights at an international and continental level. Gender power, violence, rape, and child abuse have been tackled from a research and intervention / leadership training perspective. She has contributed significantly to enhancing the material conditions of women in desperate community contexts, and has championed their cause as a scholar and advocate.

The panel seriously considered her nomination for the Community

Service award, but in the final analysis found her to be a more deserving and noteworthy candidate for the Gender Activism – Advocacy and Promotion of Women’s Rights award.

She imbues the spirit and passion of the late Feroza Adam, and her efforts continue to use education as a transformative and developmental tool. Dr GL James is awarded the Feroza Adam Award for her sustained local, continental and international policy, training and capacity building, and empowering interventions. She not only touches the lives of the desperately marginalised, reaching thousands of citizens over the past three years, but has also transformed the praxis of academics in the process. The lasting impacts are invaluable to organisational progress and advancement.

Dr James’ comments on winning the award

“I am deeply appreciative of the affirmation and encouragement I received from the Unisa Women’s Forum and the Unisa community as recipient of the ‘Gender Activism – Advocacy and Promotion of Women’s Rights’ award linked to the ‘Feroza Adams’ award.

In my work in the Chance 2 Advance programme I believe in and live by, the resource-responsibility model of our mission, that is: “to whom much is given, much is required”. It is of critical importance that I am accountable for the stewardship of the knowledge and resources I have acquired as an academic. Thank you Unisa for the training, nurturing and resources that enable me to live out my dream to support struggling communities through the liberating and revitalizing power of learning. I wish to offer special thanks to our Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Prof Baijnath and Prof Pam Ryan who nominated me. I thank Prof Baijnath for his consistent and invaluable support and the enabling environment created by the Office of the PVC.”



Prof Ruth de Villiers

Prof Ruth de Villiers, Research Professor in the School of Computing, won the Transformative and Servant Leadership award

Motivation behind Prof de Villiers’ nomination

Prof de Villiers has made considerable and sustained contributions to mentoring at Unisa over a long period. This is clear from the many recommendations received from previous mentees. She has also been a leader; holding the fort during difficult transitional phases; and she is well respected. The panel noted that she is also a rated NRF researcher, but viewed the extent to which she has exceeded academic and research expectations and performance requirements as being commendable. The alignment to the UWF vision and Unisa’s 11Cs + 1 facilitates the new desired culture. Her unflagging energy,

inspiration and support to others were commended.

She has made significant contributions to the Unisa School of Computing over a considerable length of time. She has held several leadership roles and has clearly made a significant impact in teaching and research in the College of Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET). She has a national and international impact in terms of research, publications, conference presentations and, increasingly, invited talks.

Prof Ruth de Villiers is found a deserving candidate for this award in recognition of her exceptional and sustained mentorship and assuming leadership role during difficult transitional phases of departmental life.

Prof de Villiers' comments on winning the award

“This award means a great deal to me. The Feroza Adams Women of the Year Awards have a distinct feature, in that they go beyond personal achievements and success on the part of the awardees. The awards are in harmony with Prof Makhanya’s Set of Cs! The work done with energy and passion by the winners and nominees has a ripple effect, because it relates to matters such as: mentoring, development of human capital, leadership, community involvement, and so on – in short, the support and upliftment of others. All the awardees are women who implement their ideals and who impact on others – inside and outside of Unisa, by supporting colleagues’ academic growth, empowering those who need upliftment, establishing new approaches and procedures, and by an ethos of care and encouragement.

Although the emphasis is on upliftment of women, I personally am pleased that I have also been part of academic partnerships with some wonderful male colleagues and, in so doing, have contributed to their career paths too.

My sincere wish is that in a few years time, members of the Unisa family who have been impacted by Women of the Year will, in turn, be nominees themselves and continue to pass the message forward!”



Prof Bernadene de Clercq

Prof Bernadene de Clercq, Head: Personal Finance Research Unit, won the Significant Achievements award

Motivation behind Prof de Clercq's nomination

Prof de Clercq has significant achievements and her research, workshops and conference presentations have been reported to be found useful and innovative. Her research has a considerable impact in society and practice in general. It is clear that she has made exceptional achievements as a researcher and as a research leader in the field of personal finance. Stakeholders consult her and seek her counsel and advice. These include the Reserve bank for financial stability assessment and planning, national credit regulator, and research networks with top international research institutes – Centre for Study of African Economics (CSAE) at Oxford, London School of Economics and Personal Finance Research Centre at Bristol. She visibly promotes Unisa in a diverse and very impressive range of media.

Her achievements have strengthened the Personal Finance Research Unit (PFRU), the School for Accounting Sciences, the BMR and Unisa considerably with respect to personal finance research. Her research contributes directly to a critical societal issue, has had considerable policy impacts and improves practices in general. Her achievements are impressive and duly acknowledged by the panel.

She has outstanding leadership abilities, an inspiring vision and mission, great management abilities, extraordinary networking and work-shopping skills, exceptional knowledge and technical skills. She is a mentor for emerging researchers (19 staff, of which 10 are women) and her unflagging energy and multiplier impacts of her efforts, of which the SATEA SA Tax Educators Association was established in 2012 – membership now includes 13 universities in RSA.

Prof de Clercq's comments on winning the award

“First of all I would like to thank the Unisa Women's Forum for their dedication and commitment to showcase and support the achievements and activities of women at Unisa. It is a great honour for me to be awarded the Significant Achievement award, but it is important to note that my achievements were only possible with the support and contributions of a great team. I am really blessed being part of such an inspired group of people and with their support of my vision for the Personal Finance Research Unit, I have been able to accomplish what I did over the past few years.”



Dr Liza van Jaarsveldt

Dr Liza van Jaarsveldt from the Department of Public Administration and Management won the Courage in Adversity award

Motivation behind Dr van Jaarsveldt's nomination

Dr van Jaarsveldt was chosen for this award for overcoming personal and incapacitating health challenges and still excelling; and for her inspirational attitude and motivation.

The panel was impressed with this nominee's CV because of her many impressive achievements. Despite her illness, she still managed to publish various accredited articles and complete her doctoral studies.

She clearly demonstrated "courage in adversity" at a personal and professional level, and deserves the award for this category. Her courage is amazing and remains truly inspirational. This is exactly the kind of resilience and fortitude Unisa needs to remain a leader and excellent ODL institution.

Dr van Jaarsveldt's comments on winning the award

"I am very honoured, humbled and happy to receive this award. It means a lot to me and I really appreciate it very much. Although I have had some very challenging times and was very ill, I was always blessed with support and assistance from the university, my College, my colleagues, my supervisors for my doctorate degree and my friends. You never know what challenges you will face in life and focusing on what you enjoy and what is important to you sometimes helps. Studying and doing research has always been important to me and I enjoy doing it and always learning more. Thank you to the wonderful woman that nominated me and acknowledged me."



Ms Primrose Mapepu Mathabatha

Ms Primrose Mapepu Mathabatha, General Assistant: Tuition and facilitation of Learning, won the Community Service award

Motivation behind Ms Mathabatha's nomination

Ms Mathabatha receives a special mention from the adjudication panel for spearheading regional health and wellness campaigns at the periphery. Her unfailing support and inspiration to women in the Limpopo Regional Office is noted with recognition. The UWF is serious about promoting the inclusion of women far flung from the centre and looks forward to supporting this champion.

Ms Mathabatha's comments on winning the award

"I would like to thank all women in my Region, particularly Ms Pearl Kgoete for supporting me on my endeavours. I would not have achieved this on my own. I felt so honoured and Humbled to be amongst the winners because as a woman occupying the last seat in the Institutional Organogram, I felt this is just the beginning of the long road ahead of me to serve."