

Meet Unisa's women of the year

While Unisa endeavours daily to celebrate and acknowledge the achievements of its female staff across all levels of the university, it is in the special month of August that the annual Unisa Woman of the Year awards are hosted.

Presented at the 15th Feroza Adam Memorial Lecture, the awards celebrate the excellence of Unisa's female staff. This year's categories were transformative and servant leadership, significant achievement, community service, courage in adversity, and advocacy and promotion of women's rights, which is also the overall 2013 Woman of the Year award. Presenting the awards this year were the VC, Dr Judy Henning, Chair: Unisa Women's Forum, and Rachel Prinsloo, Coordinator: Unisa Woman of the Year Awards.

The winners were Nicky Grobler (Transformative and Servant Leadership), Professor Velisiwe Gasa (Significant Achievements), Vuyokazi Maliwa (Community Service), Sister Wilma Buys (Community Service: Commendation), Rose Mashaba (Courage in Adversity), Nandipha April (Courage in Adversity: Commendation), and Dr Maria Madiope (Gender Activism: Advocacy and Promotion of Women's Rights and 2013 Unisa Woman of the Year award).



Pictured at Unisa's Women Empowerment Gala Dinner, where all the winners were acknowledged, are Prof. Mandla Makhanya (Principal and Vice-Chancellor), Dr Maria Madiope (winner of the Gender Activism: Advocacy and Promotion of Women's Rights; and 2013 Unisa Woman of the Year awards), Justice Bess Nkabinde (Judge: Constitutional Court of South Africa), and Dr Judy Henning (Chair: Unisa Women's Forum). Apart from her significant accolades, Madiope's energy and passion, lights up the room, and when she speaks, she inspires people. She is inspired about technology and education and is a walking dictionary and incredible resource on e-learning. Madiope inspires women to learn about technology and be informed about the latest trends in technology. She exemplifies a fine blend of technological innovation and critical capacity building and actively seeks to advance ICT enhanced teaching and learning. She has more than met the criteria and expectations for significant achievements, but the panel have been persuaded that her role as a techno- activist and change agent is the compelling case for her to receive the Gender Activism Award as overall winner for 2013.



Winner of the Transformative and Servant Leadership category is Nicky Grobler (OHS Officer). She has been with Unisa for 20 years in the Protection Services Department. The panel was impressed by her professional and tireless efforts to maintain levels of safety awareness and convey the seriousness about not upholding health and safety standards. She takes great pride in her job and appreciation was expressed for the quality of the reports she collates, especially in large units with than 10 committee structures. Her risk mitigation analyses and recommendations lead to practical improvements and safeguards Unisa's tangible and human assets.



Winner of the Community Service category is Vuyokazi Maliwa (Chance 2 Advance). She is a member of a small team of four who supports the Chance 2 Advance programme. The programme reaches out to more than 20 000 citizens and is expanding to all provinces across the country. The panel was convinced of the candidate's high and professional work ethic and her exemplary commitment to the vision of empowering communities through informal learning. As an ambassador of the values and giving full expression to the strategic intent of community engagement, the candidate has impacted excellently on Unisa's brand within communities and participating workshop facilitators from other organisations and institutions around the country.



Receiving a commendation for exemplary services over an extended period of time in the Community Service category is Sister Wilma Buys (Occupational Health). The panel considered the consistent quality and caring services of the candidate, given the current capacity and infrastructure constraints of her working environment. She is another unsung heroine whose services and attention to professional duty is unknown throughout Unisa.



Winner of the Courage in adversity category is Rose Mashaba (Chance 2 Advance). She is a member of a small team of four and supports the administrative and logistic functions of the dynamic project Chance 2 Advance programme. The programme reaches out to more than 20 000 citizens and is expanding to all provinces across the country. The panel were impressed by the comprehensive submission and spontaneous appreciation from participants and collaborators for the high quality of professional and caring services in a pressurised environment. Her unparalleled commitment to the vision and empowering aspects of the project, and the ability to manage this mega and complex project in contexts of conflict and danger, resonated well with the panel members.



Receiving a commendation in the Courage in adversity category is Nandipha April (USBAH and the Health and Wellness Unit). Although the panel felt that the submission spoke directly to doing the requirements of her job, it is for her courage to have disclosed her HIV status given the violent repercussions and stigmatisation attached to this act, that she is awarded a commendation in this category. Her responsibilities included coordinating awareness campaigns through presentations in various institutions, coordinating community outreach projects in the department and participating actively in the institutional health and wellness programmes, as the Health and Wellness Liaison officer for all Unisa regions. She is also a motivational speaker on commemorative days pertaining to HIV/AIDS.



Professor Velisiwe Gasa, winner of the Significant Achievements category, is the youngest black woman associate professor in the College of Education. She has achieved an impressive record of achievements in a short space of time. Since joining Unisa in 2009 she has managed to build an excellent academic record, receiving extraordinary recognition among her peers, colleagues and emerging researchers. This is due to her personality, well developed interpersonal skills and ability to balance the multiple demands of academic life with apparent ease. The panel noted her significant achievements and full slate of academic citizenship, acting as external examiner for three other institutions.

