YOUNISA

Magazine for Unisa students, alumni and friends

Issue 1 | 2018



10 646 lives touched in 2017

CHANCE 2 ADVANCE PROGRAMME GROWS FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Define tomorrow.

UNISA university of south africa









YOUNISA is published by the Department of Institutional Advancement

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Editorial

This year NASA's Solar Probe Plus is expected to orbit the Sun, testimony to how far mankind has advanced scientifically and technically. Yet, sadly, this progress is not evident in the way we are dealing with the ills that continue to beset society globally – illiteracy, poverty and unemployment, to name but three. At the start of a new year it is therefore fitting to take a look at how Unisa, *the* African university shaping futures in the service of humanity, is wielding the powerful weapon of knowledge to change lives for the better. Read about the great strides made with the university's Chance 2 Advance programme in 2017, a year in which no less than 10 646 lives were changed for the better.

On a lighter note, we asked readers to share with *YOUNISA* their new year's wishes for their fellow-countrymen – we bring you the ten best. We also take a look at research that rocks on topics as diverse as soap that changes lives, the truth about adrenalin junkies and the solutions hidden in ancient texts.

For the newest members of the Unisa family, we report on a very exciting new initiative aimed at assisting first-year students in dealing with the many challenges of higher education of the distance variety.

We trust that you will find this issue of *YOUNISA* an enjoyable read, and wish you every success for 2018.

Letterbox

We look forward to your thoughts on topics covered in *YOUNISA*.

Email your letter to younisa@unisa.ac.za, or post it to the following address: YOUNISA, Department of Institutional Advancement; PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003

Let experience lead the way

I graduated with a BCom (HRM0) in 2013, and currently I am enrolled for the BCom Hons in Business Management. I am 52 years of age and have been a school principal for the last 18 years. There are many older graduates who went into politics or the job market and who made a lot of money. In the process they built up a lot of credibility, collateral and other skills to be really successful entrepreneurs. They could easily use some of their built up pensions and start out as entrepreneurs. In the process they will open up job opportunities for the youth and then this process will cascade down from one generation of youth to the next.

The people who will do the work will be young graduates, and the older, experienced ones will provide entrepreneurial growth and development.

There will naturally be some young graduates ready to tackle the bull by its horns right away.

>**Manfredt Boois**

More than just a magazine

Well done to all the individuals who worked on and contributed to this magazine. Reflecting after reading the previous issue, two things stood out for me - I was inspired and I learnt!

A few of the stories were so inspiring that I experienced a real sense of gratitude. There are so many people facing great obstacles, yet with perseverance and sacrifice, they make it through! The last article around memory was also a great read. My husband struggles with studying and is always asking me for the strategies I employ during examinations, and I shared the article with him. Keep up the great work!

>**Carmen Biggars**

Youth unemployment in South Africa - the curse and the solution

It is with great sadness and pain that I pen this letter to all South Africans, telling them of a matter which they already know of, the youth unemployment crisis. And my worry is that those in power are too "preoccupied" with very important meetings, spa treatments, gala dinners and, of course, looting government resources meant for the poor to notice the damage being done to us, the youth of this country.

Government's noisy rhetoric on its initiatives aimed at bettering the lives of the youth is like popular deep house beats with no lyrics. They adopt policy after policy with no clear implementation strategy and no evidence showing whether the so-called initiatives are bearing fruit in the lives of the youth.

Around 3.3 million of the youth in South Africa are unemployed. Although some may be hopeful of breaking the cycle unemployment, others will most definitely not make it. This means that thousands of the youth will resort to extreme and harmful measures in efforts to try and make a living, they will go as far as stealing, if not killing for basic material things such as a smart cell-phone.

The solution:

- A commission of enquiry into unemployment must be established and tasked with the responsibility to determine the causes of unemployment causes and the challenges faced, and to find solutions.
- Economic growth. South Africa's economic growth depends on political solutions. Failure by the government led by the ANC to tackle corruption in government and state-owned enterprises undoubtedly causes economic decline, political instability and lack of trust in the government by investors.
- Social transformation cannot be fully realised without the amendment of the constitution to allow for true economic prosperity, equality and justice for all.
- Local manufacturing companies must be built and local products must be promoted. Imported goods that can be locally produced must be reduced to support the local environment. This must be done with a goal to strengthen the local industry and to ensure job creation.
- Macroeconomic policies targeting youth employment must not be reduced to mere rhetoric. Willingness and action from all parties must be seen and felt by those affected. We all have a responsibility to pursue the question of who is failing the economy and the youth.

** This letter is a shortened version of a blog post **by Thabo Makwakwa**, Deputy Chairperson of Gauteng Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command which originally appeared on the Huffington Post (www.huffingtonpost.co.za) in November last year.*

WORDWISE:

VIVA

In *Wordwise*, we take a look at interesting words or concepts in the world of academia.

We have all been part of a crowd shouting 'Viva!' at a public event or other gathering, showing our support for a person or an idea. Yet the word also denotes a university examination in which a student answers questions in speech rather than writing – in other words, an oral examination. In this sense it is a shortened form of *viva voce*, the Latin for 'live voice'.

Your wishes for the *year ahead*

We asked YOUNISA *readers to share their thoughts on what their wishes would be for their fellow-countrymen and -women for 2018. Here are the ten best*

Manning up



'My wish is to see men being true fathers to their children and families, and positive role models for young men growing up in our society,' said BA: Governance, Administration and Development student **Nqobile Makhathini**. 'I also wish young girls the wisdom to focus on their education as a sound foundation for a bright future'.

Knowing one another



'My wish for 2018 would simply be understanding: understanding amongst my fellow students and South Africans,' said BSc Computing student and BCom Financial Management graduate **George Stevenson**. 'As John Steinbeck once said, "Try to understand men. If you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and almost always leads to love." And this, now more than ever, is what we need in our country.'

Visionary educators



'This new year I wish to give my countrymen and -women the gift of good, skilled and resourceful educators,' said BA Education: Intermediate and Senior Phase student **Summaiya Mohammed**. 'It is easy to stand in front of a classroom and read from a textbook. On the other hand, accepting each learner as a unique being, building learners and empowering them takes a special educator. My wish is therefore for all South Africans to have educators who can see behind the veil and across the horizon, who can recognise potential and who can inspire.'

A change in mindset



'Our children are brought up in a violent society,' said BA Theology student **Thomas Ramaphoko**. 'But cultures do change, and my wish for my fellow countrymen is a change from this violent mentality and joining hands to build a culture of reconciliation, love and respect for all humanity.'

Girl power



'2018 will see the dawn of a great paradigm shift, and every young woman out there will walk with pride,' said Bachelor of Laws (LLB) student **Confort Malemela**. 'I wish our country young women who are ready to take on the world and say that enough is enough, who will say no to poverty, who will break the chain of poverty in their families, who will be the best they can be and who will achieve whatever they put their minds to. We cannot allow our past circumstances to make us a failed nation.'

Short and sweet



'My wish for the new year is simple and achievable,' said final-year Bachelor of Laws (LLB) student **Mahdiya Akoojee**. 'It is a world conscious of the beauty which surrounds us. A world which cares for the environment, our animals and our people. A world where everybody seeks to help, not harm. A world free of war.'

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Hope burns eternal



'My wish would be for the South African youth to realise and embrace the opportunities that are available out there,' said **Melvin Marutha**, Bachelor of Laws (LLB) student. 'Many young people have given up on life and have no hope. I feel that with this wish hope will be restored. Where there's hope, possibility thrives!'

Respect life



'My wish for 2018 is to give my fellow countrymen and -women the ability to see one another as flesh and blood so that there will be no more killings and violent crimes,' said BA Criminology graduate **Laken Peters**. 'Citizens of South Africa should not feel scared to go to the shops in the evenings, nor should they spend a fortune to secure their houses. I wish that 2018 will bring more warmth and harmony to the hearts of all South Africans. If we want to live in peace, peace first needs to be established.'

A matter of priorities



'As we go in to 2018,what I would like to see is young people taking charge of their lives, striving for greatness,' said Bachelor of Education: Intermediate and Senior Phase graduate **Mojalefa Teleko**. 'We live in a society where education is not prioritised. My wish is to see young people pushing themselves to obtain that diploma, degree, honours, master's and doctorate. Young people can shape their lives through education.'

Short and sweet



'My wish for 2018 would be to feed every hungry child in South Africa and send them to school in safe transport,' said **Devarshinee Chetty**, who is studying towards a Master's Degree in History. 'If they are not hungry, not tired and go to school, they will grow up to be all they can be. '

The students featured on these page will each receive a branded item from the Unisa Shop.

** Please note that some entries have been edited for length and style.*

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10 646 lives touched in 2017

Unisa's Chance 2 Advance programme grows from strength to strength

By Chevaan Peters

In 2017, Unisa's Chance 2 Advance (C2A) programme collaborated with academics in several colleges to reach a total of 10 646 participants in its community engagement initiatives held across South Africa. C2A is a community engagement programme located in the Division: Community Engagement. Since its inception, C2A has moved from a summer school concept to a mega community-learning programme.

Communities are poorly served and have limited access to quality learning opportunities. Access to relevant learning opportunities are obligatory for a well-informed and active citizenry who will be able to boldly tackle the challenges of nation building, social cohesion and sustainable development. For this reason, Chance 2 Advance works with great determination to ensure the democratisation of education for the betterment of society and the advancement of engaged scholarship.

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C2A rocks Mthambothini

The Chance 2 Advance programme hosted a week-long community learning and empowerment programme in Mthambothini-Siyabuswa in Mpumalanga from 11 to 15 September 2017.

> "C2A has moved from a summer school concept to a mega community-learning programme.

This programme was aimed at providing critical learning opportunities in the area of health and business. The programme consisted of five free workshops facilitated by Unisa academics. The programme reached 1 701 participants.

Chief Sobungane Slilo Mahlangu visited the workshops to encourage the community to seize the learning opportunities provided by Unisa. He thanked C2A for coming to assist his community, and said that Unisa is the only university that turned its gaze towards the development needs of Mthambothini.
The Chance 2 Advance programme returned to the community to provide certificates of attendance on 5 October. Participants were in high spirits and felt a sense of achievement.

Diepsloot residents gain health and business smarts

The C2A programme built a robust relationship with stakeholders in the community of Diepsloot. Unisa academics have been serving the community through involvement with C2A since 2012. Communities are empowered with critical knowledge to improve their circumstances, while academics discover fresh insight on social challenges and explore new research problems emerging in the community.

In 2017, C2A hosted a special programme at the request of Mr David Mabusela from the Zikuluseni Centre. The request from the community was that the programme should focus on the areas of health and business, and the initiative reached 646 members of the community.

Rehabilitation with real-life skills

Early in 2017, the Skills Development Directorate of the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) enquired about a programme for offenders and parolees. The C2A programme customised its programme offerings for the specific needs identified by DCS.

A pilot programme took place in October 2017. The programme provided specific training for offenders and parolees at three different correctional facilities in Pretoria: Kgosi Mampuru II, Soshanguve and Mabopane. The programme served both male and female offenders and parolees. The specific focus was on business and ICT (end-user computing). 75 participants were in attendance. C2A has been requested by DCS to roll out further initiatives nationally in 2018.

> "Participants were in high spirits and felt a sense of achievement.

C2A goes further afield

Chance 2 Advance conducted a programme in collaboration with the Gratitude in Education project, led by Dr Vussy Nkonyane of the College of Education. The initiative took place in the community of Mbuzini on the border of South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique. The programme provided a special social justice selection of workshops focusing on gender violence, child rape and human trafficking. 208 community members participated in the programme.

Last stop for 2017

C2A closed 2017 with a final programme in Mitchell's Plain during December. The programme was aimed at the youth, who need learning opportunities to improve their understanding of key social justice issues affecting their communities. The programme also sought to support youth in improving their education prospects and their chances of employment. This final initiative of the year was a partnership with faith-based organisations in the Cape Flats and was supported by the City of Cape Town.







Unearthing the **secrets of soil**



Ground, dust, dirt, earth, soil... call it what you will but treat it with respect. Soil is the source of much abundance, from plant crops to mud packs and sun screens, yet when it becomes contaminated, it can be linked to a multitude of health risks, including cancers, fragile bones, nervous disorders, lung disorders, stomach ulcers and infertility.

In the words of Unisa soil scientist Professor Veronica Ngole-Jeme, 'soil matters'. In unearthing some of the properties and uses of soil, she has travelled to Nigeria, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Botswana and South Africa, visiting landfills, mine dumps and farms, and walking along unpaved roads – where roadside soil sometimes has high levels of heavy metal contamination from vehicle emissions and other traffic-related activity.

'Unpaved roads are characteristic of most Sub-Saharan countries. Lead, copper, zinc, iron and cadmium are some of the heavy metals originating from the wear and tear of tyres, alloys, wires and brake parts,' said Ngole-Jeme, of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, in her inaugural professorial lecture in July 2017.

'The extent of heavy metal contamination in roadside soil varies with several factors, including poor roads, driving patterns, passenger and goods overloads, and engine revving, because these influence vehicle emissions,' she said, adding that emissions increase by a factor of ten when traffic is congested.

In Cameroon, she tested soil samples and the daily intake of heavy metals among adults and children living alongside roads, with alarming results. 'Heavy metal-related non-carcinogenic risk associated with ingestion and inhalation of roadside dust should be a major concern in areas with untarred roads,' she said, noting that children were most at risk of oral inhalation of heavy metals in dust, and adults from dermal (skin) intake.

Heavy metal contamination in soil around mine dumps and landfills is another major concern, posing ecological and health risks, arsenic and cadmium being the most ecologically toxic and magnesium and chromium the least, said Ngole-Jeme.

Soil samples taken at three iron ore dump sites in the Krugersdorp area revealed widely varying concentrations of heavy metals, from negligible to severely hazardous. At one of the sites, arsenic was found in concentrations ten times higher than levels already considered 'very high risk' ecologically.

'High concentrations of arsenic, cadmium, cobalt and nickel in mine tailings may present unacceptable risks to human populations as well as to ecosystems in the vicinity of mining areas,' said Ngole-Jeme, adding that exposure-related risks are higher among children than adults, and that heavy metals exposure has cancer-related and non-cancer health risks.

> *"Heavy metal contamination in soil around mine dumps and landfills is another major concern, posing ecological and health risks, arsenic and cadmium being the most ecologically toxic and magnesium and chromium the least.*

Metal-resistant bacteria could be the solution

Small wonder, then, that finding ways to remediate heavy metal contamination in soil is a major focus of her current research. 'We are trying to identify heavy metal-resistant bacteria which can be utilised as an inoculant in the treatment of heavy metal-contaminated environments.'

A significant hurdle in the search for bacteria that can counter metal contamination is that soil environments vary widely. 'The heterogeneity of soil environments is a challenge because well-adapted bacteria are required to bioremediate in specific environments. So far, we have identified 12 strains with heavy metal resistance and are currently assessing their efficiency as possible inoculants in the treatment of heavy metal-contaminated soil.'

Ngole-Jeme will also be looking at root exudates (secretions) of plants growing in contaminated environments, as well as the heavy metal uptake of plants in environments affected by waste disposal and mining. 'The aim will be to identify technologies that could be effective in attenuating the mobility of heavy metals in such environments.'

Making soil-eating safer

Yet another soil-related research interest is geophagia, where people deliberately ingest soil – a practice that is becoming more and more common in Sub-Saharan Africa. 'Previously, the deliberate ingestion of soils was reported mainly among pregnant women but is now highly prevalent among women who are not pregnant and even some men,' she said.

'Those indulging in the practice have used very interesting reasons to justify the eating of soil. Reasons such as pregnancy, craving, nutrient supplementation, medicinal value and hunger have been proven and documented in other studies, and were highlighted in our studies.'

Since the practice of geophagia cannot be eradicated, the challenge, she says, is to make the soils ingested safer.

Potential health hazards associated with geophagia include damage to dental enamel, anaemia and worm infections from parasites incubating in soil (geohelminths).

'Occurrence of human mortality due directly to geohelminths is low but chronic worm infestation results in sustained immune activation, which is a major enhancing factor in the pathogenesis of several diseases, including AIDS.'

This research has shown that sandy, silty soil with low concentrations of sesquioxides is fertile breeding ground for geohelminths.

Thus, Ngole-Jeme's recommendation is that soil for eating should not be collected from open fields or from top soil, where parasites are most likely to be found.

As her research shows, soil science is endlessly fascinating, revealing soil properties and uses that are as varied as the types, textures, compositions and conductivity of soils on planet earth. If Ngole-Jeme has her way, no stone will be left unturned in unearthing the many remaining hidden secrets of soil.

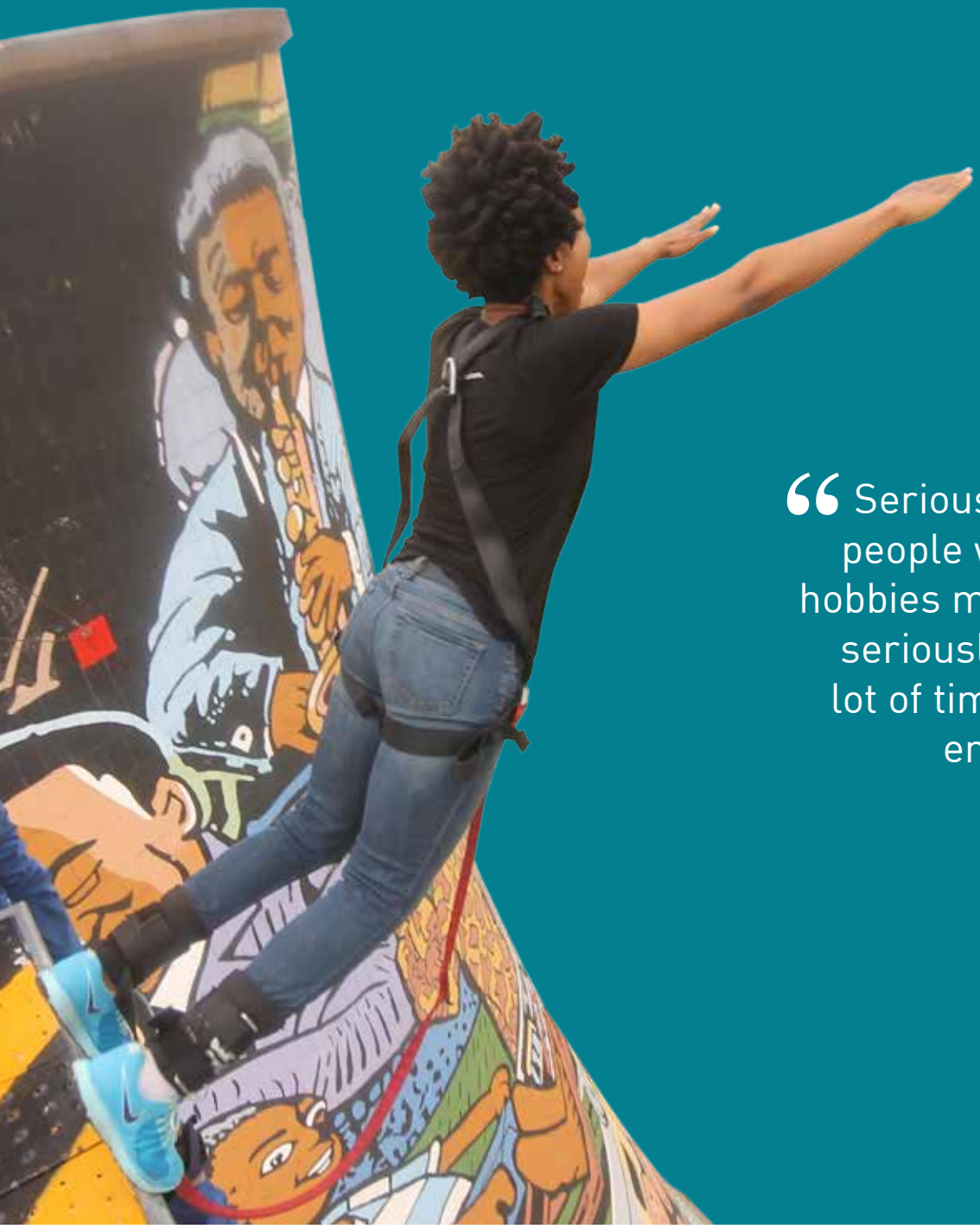
"Occurrence of human mortality due directly to geohelminths is low but chronic worm infestation results in sustained immune activation, which is a major enhancing factor in the pathogenesis of several diseases, including AIDS.



Prof. Veronica Ngole-Jeme

Adventure tourists seek *fun rather than risk*

South Africans who leap out of airplanes, swim with sharks or bungee jump from bridges are not necessarily thrill-seeking adrenalin junkies. More likely than not, they're after some serious fun and escapism, and would rather not take any real risks with life or limb. Luckily for them, the adventure tourism industry is, on the whole, trustworthy and risk averse.



> "Serious leisure is for people who take their hobbies more and more seriously and invest a lot of time, money and energy in these.

After all, if someone gets hurt or dies, the operators lose clients,' says Dr Tracey McKay, a Unisa researcher specialising in adventure tourism, an industry that is growing in popularity in South Africa.

According to her estimates, the country now has about 800 adventure tourism operators, ranging from those offering 'soft' adventure activities such as zipline and horse riding to 'hard' adventures like bungee jumping and skydiving.

Her database excludes hunting, which McKay does not consider to be adventure tourism, and this explains why her estimate of the size of the industry is significantly lower than that of the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA).

'SATSA has 3 000 operators on their list and I initially had a heart attack over the difference; then I realised that they used a different definition of adventure tourism, such as by including hunting operations.'

MacKay's adventure tourism database was believed to have been the first in South Africa – done before SATSA's – and was painstakingly compiled during her PhD studies, using a combination of internet searches, telephone interviews, site visits to operators and visits to adventure tourism shows and expos to establish the size and shape of adventure tourism in the country.

'The most popular types of activity are horse riding, scuba diving, white-water rafting and quad biking. The most underdeveloped area is the air-based adventure sector, partly because activities such as skydiving are very scary and partly because they are costly for operators. You need a plane and a pilot, a lot of operating capital, and the regulatory environment is really challenging.'

Lack of insurance and diversity

Two major challenges that the South African adventure tourism industry is facing is the struggle many operators have to find reasonably priced insurance coverage and the fact that adventure tourism attracts mainly white people. 'If the industry is to continue growing, it will have to increase its appeal among black South Africans,' says McKay, adding that quad biking is the most popular adventure tourism activity among black people at this point.

Another challenge is to strike the right regulatory balance, especially in the air-based adventure sector where regulation should be robust enough to protect tourists from undue risk without overregulation that stifles the growth of the sector.

Meanwhile, McKay has also tried her hand at estimating the economic value of the country's adventure tourism industry, but says that it is very difficult to estimate the economic value of the industry because operators are reluctant to share their financials.

What made it possible for her to attempt an estimate of the value of the shark cage diving industry, using a complex formula, was the commencement of a court case after three tourists died in a boating accident during a shark cage dive excursion. (The operator concerned was exonerated from culpability after the court found a freak wave had capsized the boat.) 'The operators had to disclose their visitor numbers and charges per trip, making extrapolation possible,' says McKay. On that basis, the shark cage diving industry alone (one small segment of the adventure tourism sector) is worth R200 million a year.

Getting serious about leisure

Her current research focus is on what is known as 'serious leisure', referring to leisure activities that involve overlaps with adventure tourism, such as trail running, where there is some risk, such as a twisted ankle or other injuries sustained while traversing rough terrain.

'Serious leisure is for people who take their hobbies more and more seriously and invest a lot of time, money and energy in these. My interest is in who is taking part in serious leisure activities and why,' says McKay, adding that she herself is a serious leisure fan, having run the Comrades Ultramarathon several times.

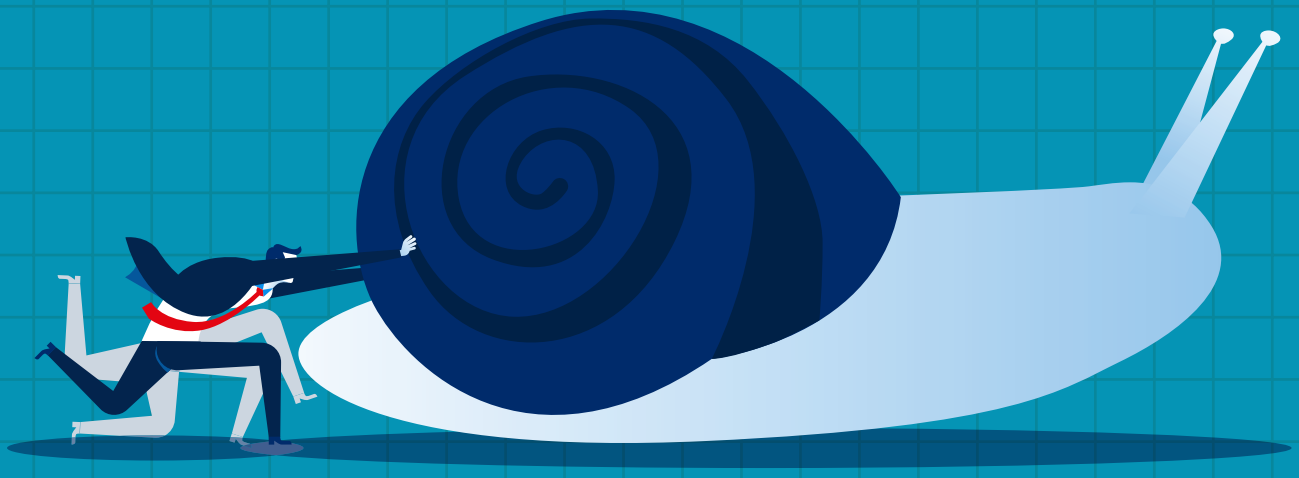
She has also personally sampled a number of other adventure tourism activities, including shark cage diving, quad biking, white-water rafting and bungee jumping. 'Skydiving is definitely on my bucket list,' she says, adding that women in particular can benefit from taking the plunge into adventure tourism.

'Generally speaking, risk-taking comes less easily to women, mainly because women are often taught from a young age to play it safe. But taking calculated physical risks, such as doing bungee jumping or white-water rafting, can be enormously beneficial to women, giving them greater self-confidence and helping them to remain young in spirit.'

> "Women in particular can benefit from taking the plunge into adventure tourism.

Why low growth could be a good thing for SA

It is dangerous to expect any economy to grow forever and South Africa's current low rate of growth could be an opportunity – not a setback – for the country and its people.



Our model of economic growth is stupid. It markets consumption as the only way to measure growth – but it doesn't talk about the quality of consumption. High growth and high consumption are exploiting people and polluting the planet,' said Professor Lorenco Fioramonti of the University of Pretoria, the opening speaker at the **Fifth Unisa Postgraduate Summer School**, hosted by the College of Graduate Studies and held at the Science Campus in Florida from 6 to 10 November 2017.

Fioramonti shattered many of the myths about conventional economic models and opened delegates' eyes to the possibilities of what he called the 'wellbeing economy'.

Selling our gold and our organs

Using a graphic example of why the world's current economic model is stupid, he said: 'If I were to sell my organs, I could make money and buy a Maserati. But it would come at a cost – the cost of something that would never come back.

'South Africa has done the same with our natural resources. We have run out of gold – sold our organs – and we have given the money to someone else,' he said, referring to foreign corporations that have benefited from South Africa's mineral wealth.

Fioramonti then asked the audience what place in the world they thought was the most polluted. 'No, it's not China,' he said in response to an audience member's suggestion. 'Up to two million people die every year from air pollution in China, and who pays? The taxpayer, not the companies that created the pollution. But no, it's not China.'

The most polluted country is also not India, he said. 'India pays USD8 billion a year to fix its pollution – and the companies that created it are not asked to pay for it – but no, it's not India.'

Rather, the most polluted place in the world is South Africa's very own Emalahleni (previously known as Witbank) because of its high concentration of coal mines and contaminated air.

'Growing our economy has done this,' said Fioramonti, adding that the drive for economic growth was also destroying other natural resources. 'Our soil quality is going down so quickly... The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) want to give the land back but it is no longer the land that was taken away. That productivity has been lost through erosion and commercial agriculture.'

False sense of security

He also asked the audience what business sector in South Africa was producing the most jobs, and received various suggestions, including mining, retail and agriculture.

'No, not agriculture,' Fioramonti said, commenting that '30% of food produced goes to waste right away'. It was also not mining. 'It used to be. Mining destroyed our land and exploited thousands of people. Apartheid had high levels of growth and polluted our water. Mining and commercial agriculture have been the biggest polluters of water.'

The sector producing the most jobs was also not retail. 'We have a very concentrated, centralised retail market,' he said, adding that the result was profits for a few people.

'Security is driving the economy. Private security is the leading business sector in South Africa, and the rise of private security is not a good sign. The underlying condition of a good economy is trust, and it is out of mistrust that a business sector is thriving.'

Fioramonti noted that pollution itself is big business.

Profiting from pollution

'Pollution leads to consumption,' he said, pointing to the many industries that have grown up around bad consumption and pollution since the 1970s, including bottled water, air conditioning, vehicles, oil and healthcare focusing on stress-related sicknesses.

'In an economy where all you are is a consumer, a target for consumption, is it surprising that our communities and families are being broken?'

Moving on to the wellbeing economy, Fioramonti said this is an economy where the focus is on improving the quality of life, not on increasing consumption.

An example of a country with a wellbeing economy is Costa Rica, where economic growth is low but life expectancy and literacy are extremely high – the highest in the Americas. 'In 1948, Costa Rica abolished the army; they don't spend their money on guns.'

'A truly sharing economy is what we need,' Fioramonti said, adding that the economy should be integrated into nature and society. 'Companies that damage the environment are not going to be seen as successful.'

The upshot of all is that is that South Africans, instead of bemoaning the slow pace of economic growth, should see this an opportunity. 'Imagine if we had a shared economy, a more just and caring economy. The fact that economic growth in South Africa is disappearing is an opportunity to think out of the box.'

The College of Graduate Studies Fifth Postgraduate Summer School comprised of six streams addressing scientific, socioeconomic and political issues.

Bubbly students use love of soap to help unemployed women make a living

Take five enthusiastic young Unisa engineering students; add a pinch of inspiration and a strong desire to help unemployed women generate an income – and you have a sellable product which can be cheaply made from everyday ingredients found around the home – soap!



***From left** Katlego Semenya, Kamogelo Sehoole, Zamanyambose Mthethwa & Saneliswa Magagula*

Katlego Semenya, who is busy with her BTech in engineering, says it all started with her love of soap and the need to do something with all the oil distilled from plants as part of her studies. After researching soap recipes, she admits that she unashamedly recruited Professor Diane Hildebrandt and Mr Ralph Muvhiiwa, both from Unisa's Institute for the Development of Energy for African Sustainability (IDEAS), to supervise the project.

Katlego was soon joined by fellow BTech student Thembelihle Ndlela, along with BSc Chemistry student Kamogelo Sehoole and two MTech Chemical Engineering students, Saneliswa Magagula and Zamanyambose Mthethwa.

Together, the five community-spirited students took on the soap-making project in earnest.

Once the recipe had been fine-tuned, and endorsed by a local councillor, it was introduced to a group of women from the Inanda community in Durban.

The three-day workshop provided the women with hands-on skills and included community upliftment, the soap-making process, safety precautions, how to extract oil from plants for scent, entrepreneurship and mentoring.

'They were so welcoming and happy to have us there. I believe many a community's drawback is its lack of leadership and in this case we are able to provide guidance by taking our skills out of the laboratory and making a positive change,' says Katlego.

The project definitely has legs, which include the inexpensive making of detergent and bath salts, she says.



> “They were so welcoming and happy to have us there. I believe many a community’s drawback is its lack of leadership and in this case we are able to provide guidance by taking our skills out of the laboratory and making a positive change, says Katlego.

Setting the wheels in motion

However, the entrepreneurial zeal of these five young students does not stop at soap. Another project in which they are heavily invested is the development of ‘sci-tech mobilabs’ – mobile laboratories – so that learners in community schools can do science experiments with laboratory equipment such as conical flasks, burettes and various chemical solutions and compounds.

This idea arose from their participation in the 2017 Sasol TechnoX expo for school learners in grades nine to 12. While speaking to some of the learners attending the expo, the Unisa students realised that many of them did not know what a periodic table was. Clearly, there was a dire need among learners for hands-on access to science skills.

Their mobile lab idea became a reality when Miners Education read about it on the Engineers Without Borders website and made contact with the Unisa team. Now four universities are involved in the mobile lab project: Unisa, Walter Sisulu University, the University of the Western Cape and the University of Johannesburg.

The manufacturers of the mobilabs, Phakamani R&D, are also partners on the project.

The immediate aim is to take mobile labs to 14 schools across South Africa, two per province, says Katlego, adding that the project team are looking for funders to help roll the project out.

A vehicle for sorely needed work-integrated learning

A compelling proposition of the mobilabs project is its dual aims. One is to assist school learners who might otherwise not be able to conduct science experiments because of a lack of laboratory equipment at their schools. The other is to create work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities for university students, as they would be the ones to take the mobile labs to communities.

Katlego explains: ‘In fields such as engineering, WIL opportunities are very scarce but you cannot graduate without it. We are all products of that system,’ she says, referring to herself and her four teammates, ‘and each of us had a personal struggle to find WIL opportunities. We were fortunate in that IDEAS took us on as interns but that kind of opportunity does not get to everyone.”

Saneliswa Magagula agrees. ‘Three years ago when I was doing my BTech, I had no idea how I was going to complete my studies and graduate. My internship at IDEAS gave me that opportunity and motivated me to do my master’s in chemical engineering as well. That wouldn’t have been possible without the opportunity to complete WIL, which can really change your life.’

No wonder these five young students are so passionate about their community projects: the mobilabs have the potential to become a vehicle for creating WIL opportunities for students from Unisa and other universities, while at the same time giving school learners the means to do science experiments.

‘Unisa would also benefit as creating WIL opportunities help Unisa to graduate undergraduate students and remove the existing bottlenecks,’ says Katlego.

While setting the mobilabs wheels in motion, she and her four teammates are not afraid to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty if that is what it takes. Soap-making is, after all, one of their skills.

> “Unisa would also benefit as creating WIL opportunities help Unisa to graduate undergraduate students and remove the existing bottlenecks.

How ancient texts could help solve ***Africa's modern-day problems***

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Social injustice, land disputes and gender discrimination are as rampant today as they were in ancient times – but an African view of the Old Testament could shed some light on possible solutions.



The oppression of women, patriarchal leadership, the experience of the working class, landlessness... these are all issues that date back to ancient times and are still relevant for modern-day South Africa. Reading the texts as a South African person with South African experience enables me to see that the Bible could be helpful in the modern context,' says Professor Ndikho Mtshiswela, head of the Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies Unit in the College of Human Sciences.

Take the question of patriarchal leadership – a common feature of the African political landscape, where strongmen rule with an iron grip and the number of female heads of state or leaders of political parties can be counted on one hand.

Precedents for strong female leaders

'Patriarchal leadership was also an issue in ancient times. In the entire Old Testament, there was only one female leader, Athaliah of ancient Israel,' says Mtshiswela, who has a Y rating from the National Research Foundation and was the 2016 winner of the Unisa Principal's Prize for Excellence in Research, awarded every two years to an exceptional Unisa researcher aged 35 or younger.

Athaliah was portrayed in a highly negative light because of the bloodthirsty manner in which she ascended to the throne, having killed off her entire bloodline. 'Despite the negative portrayal, there was some good stuff that she did,' he says. 'She was astute and courageous, and there is evidence that under her rule the nation was successful economically and spiritually.'

How is this relevant to modern-day Africa? 'The point is that Athaliah's administration was successful. She was a woman who fights and excels. That is a positive message for Africa today, proving that women are able to lead states effectively.'

He adds that the handful of women who have become senior leaders in Africa to date have some good stories to tell, pointing to Malawi's Joyce Banda, Liberia's Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson, South Africa's former chairperson of the African Union Commission Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former Deputy-President.

'Sirleaf-Johnson received the Nobel Prize for promoting reconciliation, while Banda won an international prize for leadership. Dlamini-Zuma took her position at the African Union, and before that, there were good stories about her. As for Mlambo-Ngcuka, we hear nothing about failures and she was immediately elected to the United Nations, where she is now Under-Secretary-General.'

Landlessness among women in Africa

Still on the subject of patriarchal societies, Mtshiswela says land reform in Africa is often cast in black-and-white, race-based terms, but the gender dimension of landlessness is almost always overlooked.

'When you go to the rural areas of South Africa, land is allocated to males only. When the male owner of land passes on, the title deed goes to the son, not to the daughter. The reasons are cultural: the daughter will get married and cannot take the family's wealth to another family. That is the situation in South Africa – among all cultures.'

Landless women feature prominently in the Old Testament, a good example being the widow Ruth, who was pressured into marrying and having a son to keep land ownership in the family.

'In this instance, the Bible is not helpful as it does not offer a solution and seems to endorse the oppression of women,' says Mtshiswela, adding that his focus as a researcher is on 'messages of transformation' that could positively affect African societies.

'We need to acknowledge that the Bible can be helpful and also not helpful. The text must always be read responsibly and in context, and should not be used to defend the indefensible, such as the oppression of women. Remember, the whole issue of apartheid was based on an interpretation of the Bible.'

Reading text in context



An example of how Biblical text could be taken out of context is Paul's reference to women keeping silent and covering their heads. 'If you don't read that text responsibly and understand the context, you could find the church saying that all women should be silent and should cover their heads. But read in context, it is clear that this referred to a very specific context, namely the silencing of false prophets, not of all women.'

While the Old Testament does not offer a solution to every challenge confronting modern Africa, there are many leaves that can be taken from its book. Apart from gender parity, there is the burning issue of social justice and the experience of the working class.

'In South Africa, we cannot deny the gap between the rich and poor, who are underpaid and live from hand to mouth. These people work, pay debts, struggle, work... and we find the very same cycle in Biblical text, which also has a message of liberation. That message is, Pay attention to and care for the working class. That is certainly a message that is highly relevant to South Africa at this stage of our development as a nation.'

Courageous women honoured by Unisa

By Busisiwe Mahlangu



***From left**, Gill Marcus (Outstanding Alumnus Award), Sakhi Simelane (Chairperson: Unisa Council), Thabo Mbeki (Unisa Chancellor), Sally Motlana (Unisa Robben Island Award), Prof. Mandla Makhanya (Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Unisa), Dr Frene Ginwala (Public Servant Award), and Naledi Pandor (Outstanding Educator Award)*

The recognition of four women who have been courageous and determined in bettering the lives of the citizens of our country and the lives of others around the world, took centre stage at the Unisa Chancellor's Calabash Awards on 2 November 2017.

The main guest of the evening was Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa, who was for the first time hosting the awards in his ceremonial position as Chancellor of Unisa. According to Mbeki, the calibre of awardees marked the university's role of supporting women in society. 'It is in times like these, where there's so much negativity prevailing in the country, that society forgets that there are good people who do good things. These are the people we must honour and emulate,' he said.

> "What are our children faced with? What have we done with the knowledge and skills acquired? What knowledge would our children impart?

A tough act to follow

Former Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Gill Marcus, received the Outstanding Alumnus Award for her significant contribution to society, South Africa's economic stability, and her pursuit of the independence of the country's monetary systems. Described by many as 'a tough act to follow', Marcus was thankful to her family, especially her parents, whom she said 'had an extraordinary commitment to the country's liberation and democracy'. A proud alumna of Unisa, she indicated that her parents instilled in her that education opened doors and was the pillar that would help mould and make a difference in the country. 'Without education, we cannot shape and be part of the future. This is a future that requires the country's commitment to an education system that would empower our youth with survival skills for this competitive world,' she said.

Equality, please

The Public Servant Award was presented to Dr Frene Ginwala, former Speaker of Parliament, who thanked Unisa for celebrating the contribution to change that politicians had made in South Africa. She dedicated her award to the youth of the country, as she believes the country is in pursuit of changing the education system to one that offers access. She said that she wished to see a country that eradicated sexism, especially in workplaces, and advocated equal work and equal value. 'Such countries,' Ginwala said, 'have seen remarkable changes to their GDPs. The award recognises South Africans who are making exceptional contributions to government structures.'

'Sustain the fruits of my generation'

The Unisa Robben Island Award celebrates Unisa's legacy and contribution to educating South Africa's leaders during the dark days of apartheid. Robben Island has a significant place in South Africa's political history and Unisa recognises the role of political prisoners and activists, both men and women, who made hard sacrifices towards the liberation of the country. The ongoing commitment of Sally Motlana, community pioneer and political activist, to the freedom of the country saw her receiving this award. Even though she was not held on Robben Island, she was imprisoned numerous times for her political activities against the apartheid regime.

Accordingly, she had the unique opportunity to see the dawn of democracy, a struggle that saw scores of people exiled and killed. 'To the youth of this country,' she warned, 'it is your turn to deepen and sustain the fruits of my generation.' Even though education in this country has been an exclusive dream, Motlana believes that pivotal questions remain. 'What are our children faced with? What have we done with the knowledge and skills acquired? What knowledge would our children impart?' According to her, the struggle for education continues.

A proud tradition of education

Naledi Pandor, Minister of Science and Technology, received the Outstanding Educator Award for excelling in her service to society and in making transformative contributions to teaching, learning, and research.

Her parents' caring role ensured that they went to school. Her strong affinity with Unisa also stems from the fact that she is the granddaughter of Professor ZK Matthews, the first African to obtain a BA degree through Fort Hare University, which had Unisa as an examining body at the time.

Pandor said she was in support of the development of educators at universities – a call the Chancellor had made earlier that evening. 'There is a great need for young academics to research current prevailing issues of decolonisation and #FeesMustFall that impact on the lives we live. Only academics can be able to respond to issues of the sustainability of the country and continent through the establishment of chairs and to become knowledge makers of this world.'

> "There is a great need for young academics to research current prevailing issues of decolonisation and #FeesMustFall that impact on the lives we live. Only academics can be able to respond to issues of the sustainability of the country and continent through the establishment of chairs and to become knowledge makers of this world.

Meeting the fees challenge

Reflecting on the events that had taken place in the last few years, Unisa Principal and Vice-Chancellor (VC) Professor Mandla Makhanya warned that society should not forget the effects of the #FeesMustFall campaign. He said that even though 2017 was kinder, with less student unrest and violence, 'the country is still awaiting the formal release of the Fees Commission report, which has already drawn adverse reactions'.

The VC further warned that escalating costs and threats to sustainability meant that 2018 would herald another year of austerity where everyone would be affected. He said that the university was taking this challenge head on and with vigour, hence the various fundraising initiatives from Unisa staff, Unisa Council, and the Principal's Bursary Fund to help ease the funding challenge.

Building the #ZeroHunger generation



Children and staff from Sparrow Village in Maraisburg and Unisa CAES staff and partners celebrated World Food Day together.

World Food Day creates awareness for people who are experiencing poverty and food scarcity. In addition, it serves as a platform to share strategies on ways to alleviate lack of food and malnutrition in communities, thereby ensuring food security and nutritious diets for all. The College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences joined the celebration on 20 October 2017 as part of its community engagement activities. The event was held at Sparrow Village in Roodepoort, which is an orphanage home and hospice that provides care and well-being to adults and children infected or affected by the HIV/Aids pandemic. The department has been involved in projects such as these since 2010.

Africa's blue economy on the crest of a wave

Experts from African universities recently met at the University of Seychelles (UniSey) to discuss the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 and blue economic strategy and to meet members of UniSey's James Michel Blue Economy Research Institute (Beri). Professor Raphael Mpofu, Deputy Executive Dean of the College of Economic and Management Sciences, led the delegation that included representatives from Unisa, as well as delegates from Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Tanzania. The discussions centred on matters relating to economic development driven by a blue ocean economy initiative in line with the AU Agenda 2063 and how cooperation with UniSey could be strengthened.



Prof. Raphael Mpofu (Deputy ED: CEMS)

A country 'lost in transition'?



Prof. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (Director of Scholarship: Change Management Unit, Unisa)

Professor Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Director of Scholarship in Unisa's Change Management Unit, explored the idea of South Africa as a national question from a decolonial perspective when he delivered the sixth annual Neville Alexander Memorial Lecture in Cape Town. He queried whether the idea of an inclusive South Africa was still in the making, whether it was incomplete, or whether it was proving very hard to resolve. What was clear, he pointed out, was that the country seemed to be 'lost in transition' to the extent of provoking struggles from below for life as well as intra-elite/class struggles from above for power and consumption.



Tito Mboweni, former Governor of the Reserve Bank

Driving Africa forward

Tito Mboweni, former Governor of the Reserve Bank, delivered the keynote address at the first African Operations Management Conference organised by Unisa's Department of Operations Management. He talked about optimising operations management in Africa through collaborative innovation for global competitiveness. The theme of the conference that was held from 2 to 4 October 2017 at Muldersdrift was Competitive operations management for driving Africa forward. The conference comprised workshops, student colloquiums, industry visits, keynotes, panel sessions, special sessions, industry presentations, and academic presentations.

Is this how the coalition cookie crumbles?

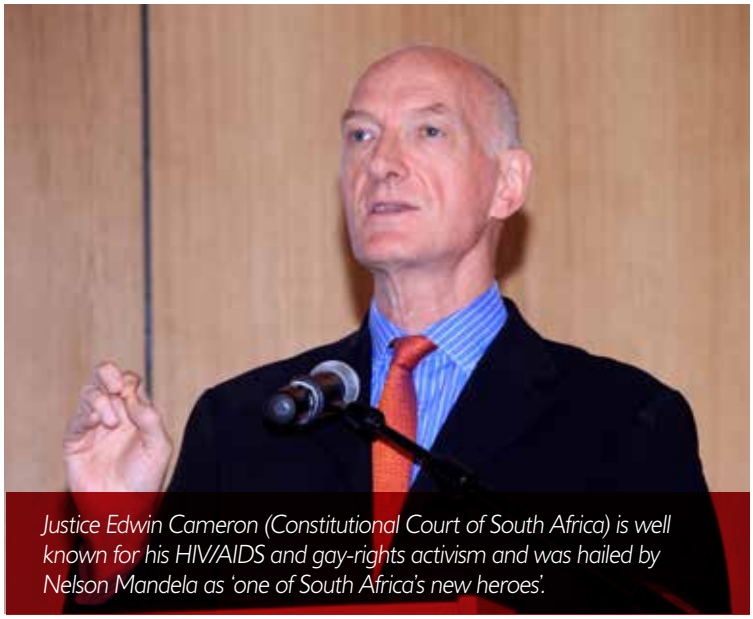
The absence of an outright winner in the key metros of Tshwane, Johannesburg, and Nelson Mandela Bay (as well as some municipalities) during the 2016 Local Government Elections ushered in a new era of coalition politics. Hailed as a much-needed redefinition of the political landscape and the future of South African politics, this new political arrangement is beginning to show cracks early in its infancy. Hosted by the Tiso Blackstar Group, in association with Unisa, a Sowetan Dialogue evening, provided a pivotal platform to discuss a myriad of issues surrounding this phenomenon.



Pictured at the Unisa-Sowetan Dialogue: Prof. Simphiwe Sesanti (Associate Professor at the Institute for African Renaissance Studies at Unisa), Nompumelelo Runji (policy analyst, researcher, author and speaker), and Prof. Dirk Kotzé (Professor in Political Sciences at Unisa)

The 1 250 best universities in the world – Unisa makes the cut

In October US News & World Report released the 2018 Best Global Universities rankings, including the top tertiary learning institutions in South Africa. The overall rankings evaluate 1 250 universities – up from 1,000 last year – across 74 countries and are the largest and most comprehensive assessment of research universities worldwide. For South Africa, the University of Cape Town sits just outside the top 100, followed by the University of Witwatersrand, which placed 216th overall. Unisa is placed 11th in South Africa and 28th in Africa.



Justice Edwin Cameron (Constitutional Court of South Africa) is well known for his HIV/AIDS and gay-rights activism and was hailed by Nelson Mandela as 'one of South Africa's new heroes'.

Understanding the LGBTI struggle

Speaking at the fourth Quiltbag project seminar at Unisa, Justice Edwin Cameron said he believes we stimagise others because we stigmatise ourselves. 'And that stigma comes from a place very deep within ourselves,' he said. 'If we don't understand that our particular history as South Africans, the struggle, of blood, sweat and human lives, produced our constitution, then we don't understand where we are heading and we don't understand what we are fighting for today,' Cameron added with regards to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) challenges.

Courageous Gordhan honoured

During an event celebrating leadership with courage and integrity, Pravin Gordhan, former Minister of Finance, was awarded the Unisa Graduate School of Business Leadership (SBL) Leadership in Practice Award (LIP). This award was instituted in 1989, with 24 outstanding South Africans to date being the recipients. LIP is an accolade that recognises exceptional South Africans who have demonstrated impeccable leadership skills. Prominent business, political and community leaders attended the gala dinner in Sandton.



Pravin Gordhan (former Minister of Finance and recipient of the 2017 SBL Leadership in Practice Award) and Cecil Thokoane (Chair: SBL Alumni Associated Executive Committee)



Prof. Mandla Makhanya, Unisa Principal and Vice-Chancellor

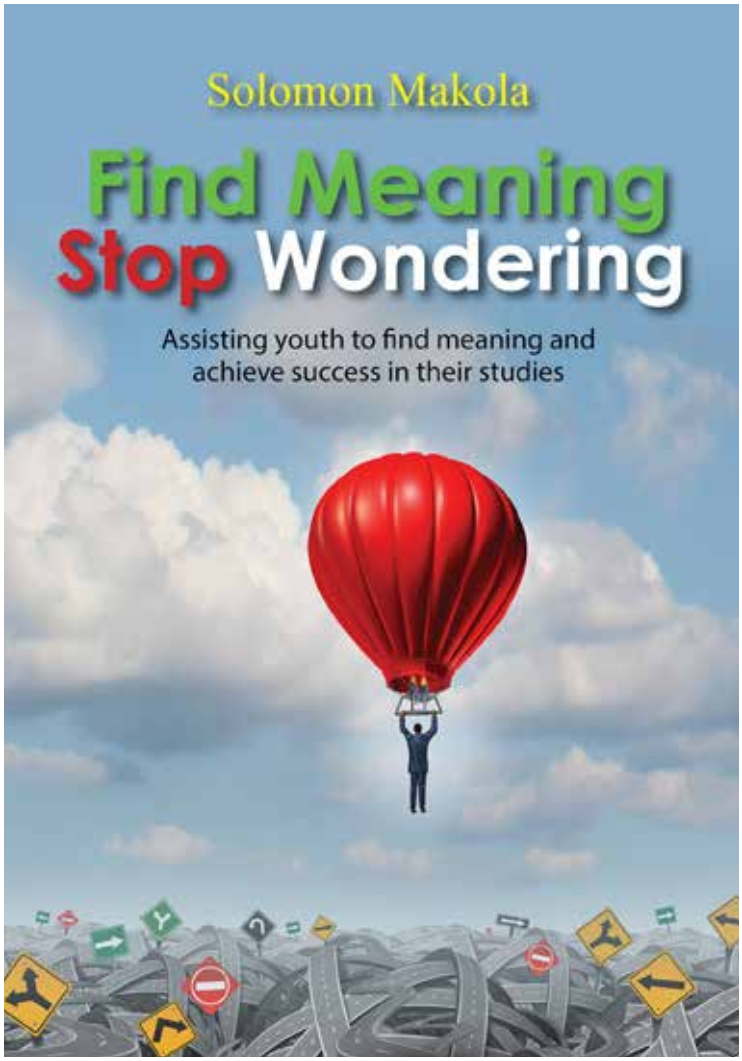
2017 a watershed year for transformation at Unisa

Much of 2017 has been focused on transformation and this will continue concertedly into 2018 and beyond, until we are satisfied that we are becoming the university that is envisaged in our vision and our strategy,' said Professor Mandla Makhanya, Unisa's Principal and Vice-Chancellor (VC). He was speaking at the official closing ceremony of the 2017 academic year. The VC urged that efforts should be coordinated and integrated for maximum benefit and impact to ensure that genuine change remains at the centre of Unisa's transformation as a 21st century African university.

These three new offerings from **Unisa Press** will undoubtedly be on the 2018 reading list of many South Africans.

Visit Unisa Press online at www.unisa.ac.za/press.

Find meaning, stop wondering



By Dr Solomon Makola

Find meaning, stop wondering grew out of a testimony of hope that has touched and changed millions of lives. Rooted in the philosophy and practices of Holocaust survivor Dr Viktor Frankl, the book proposes that meaning can be found even under the most devastating and stressful of circumstances.

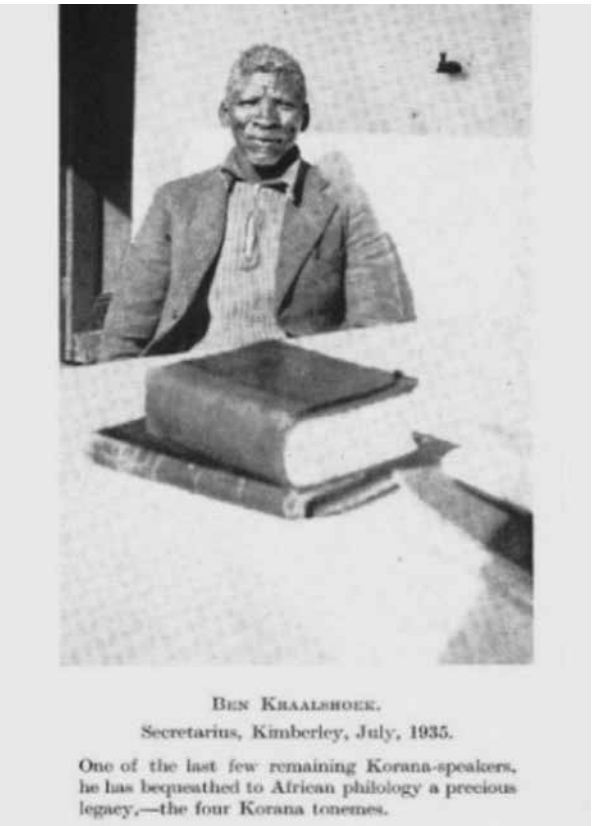
Mining the wealth of his professional experience, Makola throws a spotlight on ways of helping students to dedicate themselves successfully to an appropriate choice of study – one suited to their interests and passions. From there he encourages them to see their lives in the context of a broader meaning, stimulating engagement of a positive life orientation that will contribute to the successful completion of their studies.

While Makola identifies a select readership – those searching for meaning in their lives – *Find meaning, stop wondering* also appeals to readers from the field of education concerned to combat the high dropout rate, especially among black students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

He positions the reader not as a helpless victim of fate but as a victor whose life challenge is to make the right choices, and to maintain a positive attitude. Even suffering can have meaning, depending on the attitude we take towards it.

This orientation makes *Find meaning, stop wondering* compelling to read, not only for adherents of logotherapy but also for the lay reader and the public.

KORA: A lost Khoisan language of the early cape and the Gariep.



Ben Kraalshoek.
Secretarius, Kimberley, July, 1935.
One of the last few remaining Korana-speakers, he has bequeathed to African philology a precious legacy,—the four Korana tonemes.

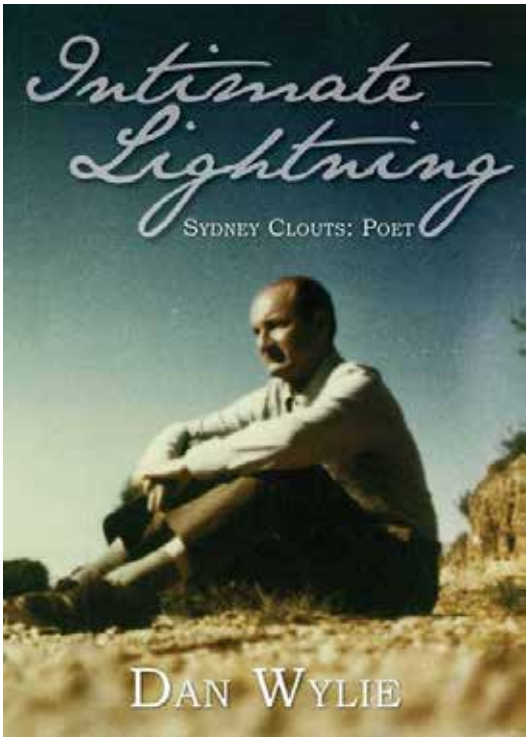
By Menán du Plessis

Forthcoming, March 2018, from Unisa Press & South African History Online: print edition (Unisa Press) with a parallel open access online edition (SAHO).

This fascinating book will appeal to both serious academics and readers with an interest in early South African heritage. Central to the book are 62 historical narratives, personal and social histories, and folktales and lyrics in the original Khoekhoe language of the early Cape and the Gariep, with footnotes and layout with the Kora and English texts placed side by side.

The parallel English translations on facing pages are deliberately literal, since they are intended as an aid to reading the texts in the original language. The publication also contains a bilingual dictionary, with look-up options in both Kora and English.

Intimate lightning – Sydney Clouts, Poet



By Dan Wylie

Intimate Lightning is the first book-length study of a poet who, though still frequently anthologised, has fallen into some obscurity. Yet Sydney Clouts (1926-1981) was acknowledged by many during his lifetime as the strongest poet of his generation, albeit a difficult and elusive one. His Cape Town-inspired poetry fizzes with energy, an adventurous vivacity of image, a capacity for delight, an authentic humility, yet an authoritative sense of cerebral depth. Reading Clouts attentively is still both a poetic delight and a heady intellectual challenge.

This study is biographically-framed, but is centrally an appreciation of the poetry. The exploration is supported by interviews with family, friends and colleagues, but draws most importantly on archival sources: his letters, notebooks, and some 1 700 pages of drafts that illuminate his methods. It unpacks his essential themes, follows up his wide and eclectic reading, explores his relation to the troubled politics of the apartheid era, and offers an explanation of the poetry's philosophical underpinnings.



Partnering with you on

01

It has become common knowledge that many first-year students experience challenges when transitioning into a new learning environment, **especially those entering ODeL institutions.**



07

The following will be covered in the FYE MOOC: ODeL readiness; career management skills; student support orientation; digital skills; ***myUnisa*** orientation; academic literacy; study skills; and library orientation.





06

Also coming your way, is the **FYE MOOC** (Massive Open Online Course) which serves to familiarise and orient you to studying at Unisa, as well as the available support services.

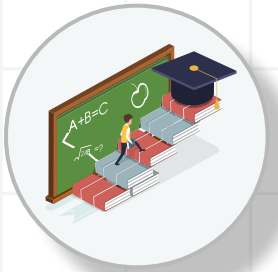


05

Recently, you may have noticed weekly emails coming in... These emails have been designed with the first-year student in mind, aimed at providing pertinent information at key points through your student walk. Please check your *my*Life email accounts on a regular basis to keep abreast of important information.



your first-year student journey



02

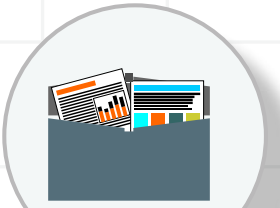
To mitigate some of these challenges, Unisa has established the Student Retention Unit (SRU).



03

The SRU's current focus is the implementation and coordination of a **First-Year Experience (FYE) programme** at Unisa.

Got any questions?
fye@unisa.ac.za



04

What are some aspects of the **FYE?**



Much of 2017 has been focused on transformation and this will continue concertedly into 2018 and beyond, until we are satisfied that we are becoming the university that is envisaged in our vision and our strategy ”

- Prof. Mandla Makhanya, Unisa Principal and Vice-Chancellor