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Night of stars as UCT staff honoured at inaugural awards ceremony

It was the “Night of the Stars” when the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) inaugural annual awards were held on Monday, 19 November 2018.

UCT stars came out shining while the various performances lit up a memorable evening at the Memorial Hall, where 450 academic and Professional, Administrative and Support Services (PASS) staff members were awed and wowed as they attended an historic event.

For the first time in UCT’s history, the various awards categories previously held at different periods during the course of the year were rolled into one ceremony, with the result being a beautiful and special evening aptly dubbed “Night of the Stars”.

The four categories on the night were the Long Service Awards, Ad Hominem Academic Promotions, Alan Pifer Award and Distinguished Teachers Award.

The highlights included [Professor Heather Zar receiving the Alan Pifer Award](#), and four academics – [Gregor Leigh](#), [Associate Professor Jacqueline Yeats](#), [Professor Pradeep Navsaria](#), and [Professor Robert Dunn](#) – being recognised for their commitment to teaching and learning through the Distinguished Teacher Awards.

A total of 133 academic and PASS staff were recognised for their length of service to the university, while 104 academic, scientific and technical staff members were promoted to higher ranks. These include 18 staff members promoted to professors (eight female and 10 male), and 37 promoted to associate professors (21 female and 16 male).

UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng said: “This evening represents another example of how we can begin to build an even stronger community: a community where everyone’s contribution is valued and excellence is acknowledged in all aspects of our operations.”

First to be feted were the Long Service Award recipients, a category that recognises staff members who have served the university with distinction, dedication and diligence over either 15, 25, [35](#) or 45 years.

Newly-appointed Chief Operations Officer, Dr Reno Morar, explained just how rare a breed these categories of employees are.

“It is increasingly rare around the world for staff members to stay with the same organisation for longer than four or five years. But I think we can all agree that for many of us, UCT is not just an employer – it is a calling that speaks to the hearts of many people, no matter what job we undertake here.”

The standout moment was when [Robert Samuels](#), the senior laboratory assistant in the Department of Integrative Biomedical Sciences, was the recipient of the award for 45 years of service. Astonishingly, when Samuels joined UCT in 1973, his first pay cheque was R18.

The second awards category celebrated academic staff members promoted to a higher rank in a process described by Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, Associate Professor Lis Lange, as being “rigorous” and assessing “one’s performance in teaching, supervision, research output, administration and leadership, as well as one’s participation in socially responsive activities.”

The Alan Pifer Award is a prestigious prize presented annually by UCT’s vice-chancellor in recognition of outstanding socially responsive research, and Professor Zar was a worthy recipient. She is the chair of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, as well as the director of the South African Medical Research Council Unit on Child and Adolescent Health at the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital.

Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation, Professor Michael Kyobe said: “A world-renowned paediatrician and scientist, Professor Zar has gained a reputation for rising above the challenges posed by a lack of resources to create new strategies to address key childhood illnesses that cause death among children – pneumonia, tuberculosis (TB) and asthma.”

The final group of staff members to be honoured was the quartet of Gregor Leigh from the Department of Physics, Associate Professor Jacqueline Yeats from the Department of Commercial Law, Professor Pradeep Navsaria from the Division of General Surgery, and Professor Robert Dunn from the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery. These four received the Distinguished Teachers Awards.

Associate Professor Lange said: “The Distinguished Teacher Awards represent UCT’s highest teaching accolades that acknowledge and celebrate excellence and innovation in teaching.”

Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Transformation, Professor Loretta Feris, summed up the night in two appropriate phrases when she described it as “a brilliant evening” and “a star-studded event.”

She said: “It is my privilege to thank the most important people in this room: the people whose hard work, loyalty and passion have given us such wonderful reasons to celebrate. Thank you to each and every award recipient and to your partners for the support you have given to UCT. You are making it a place of stars.”

It was lit. It was trending (Twitter confirmed less than 50 minutes into the event). It was memorable and unforgettable. It was truly a Night of the Stars that recognised UCT’s staff and their commitment to the institution.

- [See a selection of photos from the event.](#)
- [See a Twitter summary of proceedings as the event unfolded.](#)

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