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UCT student's scholarship platform bags three prestigious social responsiveness awards

Africademics, a scholarship platform created by University of Cape Town (UCT) PhD candidate Lena Gronbach, has been honoured with three prestigious social responsiveness awards.

The online platform is a community for students, early-career researchers and young professionals in and from Africa. Gronbach, a second-year PhD candidate in UCT's Department of Sociology, started Africademics in 2019 after her search for funding.

As a German national, she struggled to find funding opportunities that would enable her to pursue her studies in South Africa. But while searching, she came across many exciting programmes, scholarships and opportunities for African students and decided she'd share her finds with peers.

What began as a [Facebook page](#) is now a multiplatform initiative with a presence on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [WhatsApp](#) and an [Africademics website](#). Since launching, Gronbach has shared more than 1 000 scholarship opportunities, which includes funding for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies, as well as study-abroad opportunities and research fellowships.

For her hard work, and as validation of Africademics' aims, Gronbach has received three prestigious awards. The first is the annual social engagement prize awarded by [The German Academic Scholarship Foundation](#) to scholarship holders who run social initiatives.

The award consists of a cash prize, [a fundraising campaign](#) through the foundation's alumni network, a coaching weekend, a formal award ceremony in 2021 and ongoing mentoring and support. She will use the prize money to expand the [Africademics University Ambassador Programme](#), share more scholarships and opportunities, host information-sharing events and offer webinars and personal support for students who wish to apply for scholarships.

"Receiving the award has reinforced my drive for more equality and opportunities in the field of higher education," she said.

The second award Gronbach received for her work with Africademics is the [startsocial](#) scholarship, an annual coaching and mentoring programme for social start-ups that is run under the patronage of German chancellor, Angela Merkel. Every year 100 initiatives are

selected for the first round of coaching, and the best projects will receive additional prizes in 2021.

The third honour she received is the recent announcement that Africademics has been selected as one of the participants of the [Global Goals Lab](#), a networking and qualification programme for social initiatives working towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Participating in the Global Goals Lab has given me the opportunity to connect with other social initiatives that work towards the SDGs,” said Gronbach. “Through the current collaboration phase of the programme, we will be able to expand our network, share experiences and learn from the successes (and failures) of other organisations.”

Gronbach aims to increase access to higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, where less than 10% of young adults were enrolled at a university, according to a 2018 UNESCO report.

Gronbach said: “These awards have really given me the recognition and support I needed to take Africademics to the next level. Receiving so much positive and constructive feedback on my initiative and seeing the growing interest in my organisation have shown me that we are on the right path.”



UCT PhD candidate Lena Gronbach.

Photo: Supplied

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