



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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Teaching excellence recognised at UCT

Many may have been taken aback when Dr Tessa Dowling appeared on the screen speaking fluent Xhosa for over three minutes to accept the Distinguished Teacher Award at the recently-held virtual UCT Annual Awards.

But Dr Dowling's command of Xhosa extends beyond just those three minutes – it is what the senior lecturer in African Language does on a daily basis as she teaches Xhosa as a second language (this includes grammar, but with the emphasis on the grammar being useful to conversation and listening) in the Xhosa Communication stream. She teaches all courses from first to third year as well as in the honours in African Languages and Literatures programme.

Dr Dowling is consistently described as an exceptional teacher who takes a student-centred approach and demonstrates an awareness of the why and how of her teaching.

She has been recognised for her outstanding teaching and contribution to the promotion of teaching-and-learning excellence at the University of Cape Town (UCT). She is one of four recipients of the 2019 Distinguished Teacher Award, alongside [Professor Andrew Argent](#), [Associate Professor Amrita Pande](#) and [Associate Professor Romy Parker](#). It is the highest accolade awarded to teaching staff at all levels within the university.



According to Dowling to be a good teacher there are some basic things like being well prepared and knowing your subject. Then there is flexibility, humility, humour and a willingness to change to suit the needs of different types of students.

"I love students who make me laugh and those who are self-motivated; second-language students who laugh at their own errors and then correct them, for example, saying "*Ndiyabulala*" (I murder) instead of "*Ndiyabulela*" (I am grateful); and first-language students who mix Xhosa with English and Afrikaans in creative and expressive ways, like "*Ndoyiswe finish n klaar yile korona!*" (I am so over this corona!); students who listen out for everything that is said in the language, tell me about Xhosa songs, movies and memes and get excited about it and share everything they learn with me," she shared while reflecting on the best parts of teaching.

Commenting on the significance of the award Dowling said: "It's huge! You work so hard, you feel entranced by students stumbling towards knowledge and speech and then standing up on their own ... but you are not sure if anyone notices or cares about this side of the university. Or this side of being an academic."



Dr Tessa Dowling

Photo: Je'nine May/UCT

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Aamirah Sondag

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5427
Cell: (076) 947 6071

Email: aamirah.sondag@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za