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Bongani Mayosi medical prize winner vows to lift others as she rises



Dr Peace Francis

Photo: Lerato Maduna/UCT

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University of Cape Town (UCT) alumnus Dr Peace Francis has won the 2020 Bongani Mayosi Medical Students Academic Prize. The prestigious national award recognises final-year medical students who epitomise the leadership qualities and values of the late UCT Dean of Health Sciences, Professor Bongani Mayosi. Among these is the saying "Lift as you rise".

For Francis, Mayosi's mantra of "lift as you rise" describes the humility and rarity of him. "He epitomised servant leadership – which is not self-serving, but rather community-, nation- and world-building. I see this mantra as a constant reminder that my life is not to

be lived for myself, but for others' enjoyment and advancement – a life with a God-given purpose. Throughout our continent, we need more leaders who see beyond themselves and how they could benefit. For me personally, this mantra speaks to being the type of person – the type of leader – who sees people deeply and honestly; sees them where they are, and works to create opportunities for "lifting".

Francis, a Klaus-Jürgen Bathe Leadership scholar, is now a medical intern at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto.

Throughout her life her parents have been her biggest supporters, and as she grew up, they always encouraged her in her various interests. "My interests and career choices changed multiple times as I grew up, until I finally settled on medicine," she shared.

"This was confirmed while listening to an interview by Dr Mamphela Ramphele [a former UCT vice-chancellor]. She was asked whether she regretted studying medicine, as she'd gone on to do many other things in her life. She responded emphatically with a "No!", because "training in medicine is training in leadership".

Francis arrived at UCT ready to absorb and learn as much as she could – about the core medical content, but also about the 'soft' skills and rare perspectives that medicine provides.

"I have been so privileged to have found friends and mentors who have motivated me to take on various leadership positions: subwarden at my residence, chairperson of the Health Sciences Students' Council (HSSC), vice-president of SHAWCO Health, and chairing the UCT Student Governance Court.

"These positions taught me so much about leadership and about service and opened my eyes to the difference a group of students can make. My time in SHAWCO Health, for example, reminded me that we as students could make a difference in the health status of our community."

Speaking on her engagement with the late Mayosi, she shared: "Over the years I had the opportunity to work with Prof Mayosi – at times quite closely during my time in the HSSC; first in my role as head of public relations and marketing, and later in my role as chairperson of the council. He was the most inspiring and approachable leader I have ever met. One moment I remember is from 2017, at the end of my term as chairperson of the HSSC, when we held an event called Masithethe Sakhane, aimed at inspiring young black health sciences students to pursue careers in academia. It was close to Mayosi's heart.

"After the event, he asked me what my plans were and where I wanted my life to go. I shared some ideas and thoughts. And once I was done, he gave me ideas and suggestions that were much bigger than my current dreams. He saw more potential in me than I saw in myself. That day I realised that this was his worldview, and how he interacted with those around him: a deep belief in a person's brilliance and potential that even they could not see."

Reflecting on the award, Francis shared that it was also quite bittersweet. "It is a dream come true to be the recipient of an award that bears Professor Bongani Mayosi's name, but it's also a reminder of a great loss; a reminder that he is no longer with us. Most of all, it is a reminder to continue his legacy – being excellent, and lifting as we rise, as was his mantra."

All South African final-year medical students are eligible for the award and are nominated by their peers. The Faculty of Health Sciences' runner up is Inga Mgaleli. Awards were also made to final-year students in those UCT faculties that play a role in teaching medical students.

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