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UCT student entrepreneurs go for gold at competition final

A trio of budding University of Cape Town (UCT) student entrepreneurs scooped the 2021 Entrepreneur University of the Year Award during the final round of the Entrepreneurship Interservice competition last week.

But that's not all. The university's Tshogofatso Masenya, a fifth-year medical student, walked away with the national Student Entrepreneur of the Year Award; and her crowdfunding platform, GoShare, also topped the social impact category.

Following in close succession were Master of Commerce student Chido Dzinotywei – whose business, Vambo Academy, scooped first prize in the existing business tech category – and in third place in the social impact category, Vuthlarhi Shirindza's business Chewi. Shirindza is a fourth-year medical student at UCT.

"We are proud of our tenacious students. They put on an excellent performance and flew the UCT flag so high. The competition was tough, but they did brilliantly," said Nadia Waggle, UCT's Entrepreneurship Interservice competition coordinator and the head of operations at the UCT Careers Service. Waggle managed the group of student entrepreneurs from the start of the competition and made sure that they had the resources they needed to succeed over the multiple stages of the event.

The Entrepreneurship Interservice competition is an initiative of the Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education programme. The competition aims to identify the top student entrepreneurs at each of South Africa's 26 public universities, recognise and showcase their businesses, and attract investors to their enterprises. The country's top student entrepreneurs went head to head in a two-day national final in Johannesburg on 18 and 19 November.

Students pitched their business ideas to a panel of judges, after which the judges conducted question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions to gain a better understanding of each concept.

As Masenya, Dzinotywei and Shirindza took to the stage, Waggle said, it was clear from the get-go that they believed in their concepts, and that their ideas could make a difference in society. She said they spoke confidently and with great passion and answered the judges' questions with ease.

“Our students produced outstanding pitches. But I still maintain that the Q&A session is the most stressful [section] – you have no idea what will come your way. Our students were so well prepared, and their responses to [the] judges’ questions were flawless,” Waggie said.

Approximately 4 000 student entrepreneurs participated in the competition, which kicked off with internal university rounds in mid-June, followed by the regional round in September. The 28 winners of the regional leg of the competition proceeded to the national final.

The final event, Waggie said, was unlike any other competition she’s ever been involved in. As each participant prepared for their pitches and Q&As, the atmosphere was palpably tense. But Waggie said the spirit of camaraderie and collegiality among the group of students was evident at all times.

“It was fabulous to witness how much they cared for each other’s well-being, and how they supported and rooted for each other during the event,” she said.

“We did it. We couldn’t be prouder of our students and their efforts during this rigorous competition. We look forward to seeing what the 2022 Entrepreneurship Intersivity competition holds,” Waggie said.

Story by Niémah Davids



From left Chido Dzinotywei, Tshegofatso Masenya and Vuthlarhi Shirindza.

Photo: Supplied

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