

ANNUAL UFS LEARNING AND TEACHING CONFERENCE

Quality Enhanced Learning and Teaching:

Human-Centred Learning and
Teaching for Societal Impact

7 – 11 SEPTEMBER 2026

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

T: +27 51 401 7342 / 9298 | E: ASLD@ufs.ac.za | www.ufs.ac.za

*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives
through quality, impact, and care.*



UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA
CENTRE FOR TEACHING
AND LEARNING (CTL)

Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference and Awards 2026

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of the Free State (UFS) is pleased to invite all UFS staff members involved in learning and teaching to submit applications for the Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference 2026.

The UFS Learning and Teaching Awards recognise academic and support staff for their innovative learning, teaching, and academic support practices in different disciplines. The awards also recognise the advancement of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) at the institution.

CONFERENCE THEME

Quality Enhanced Learning and Teaching: Human-Centred Learning and Teaching for Societal Impact



INTRODUCTION

Quality in learning and teaching at the UFS is reflected in the intentional design of coherent, engaging, and contextually relevant learning experiences that support student success, meaningful knowledge application, and graduate impact (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Trigwell, 2012). The higher education landscape is increasingly shaped by rapid technological advancement and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI). Traditional approaches to learning and teaching are being challenged, which necessitates a renewed focus on the human dimensions of learning (Holmes, Bialik and Fadel, 2019; Holmes and Tuomi, 2022). Human-centred learning and teaching approaches foreground student agency, critical thinking, collaboration, and ethical engagement to enable graduates to work effectively alongside intelligent technologies while responding to complex societal challenges (Porayska-Pomsta, Holmes and Nemorin, 2024). This aligns with the UFS's strategic vision of a student-centred, innovative, and regionally engaged university that is committed to responsible societal futures through sustainable innovation. Approaches such as work-integrated learning and authentic, practice-based pedagogies are central to connecting theory and practice, enhancing employability, and preparing graduates to contribute meaningfully, both locally and globally (Jackson, 2015; Billett, 2021). This conference invites contributions that demonstrate how academic and support staff are advancing human-centred, quality learning and teaching for societal impact.

AIMS OF THE UFS LEARNING AND TEACHING CONFERENCE AND AWARDS

The UFS Learning and Teaching Conference aims:

- to promote, recognise, and reward quality, innovation, and excellence in learning and teaching in the South African and UFS contexts;
- to generate debate and public awareness about what constitutes quality and excellence in learning and teaching with societal impact;
- to share best practices, innovative ideas, and research findings related to learning and teaching; and
- to promote the SoTL.



CATEGORIES

The Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference comprises **five main categories**, namely:

- Innovation in Learning and Teaching
- Research in Learning and Teaching
- Short Learning Programmes
- Excellence in Learning and Teaching Support
- Vice-Chancellor's Awards in Learning and Teaching

Abstract submissions

Innovation in learning and teaching is central to advancing the UFS's commitment to academic excellence, student success, and responsible societal futures. The UFS Strategic Plan 2023–2028 positions the institution as a student-centred, innovative, and regionally engaged university, with a strong focus on preparing graduates who are adaptable, digitally literate, and capable of addressing complex societal challenges through sustainable innovation.

International, national, and institutional evidence underscores the critical role of meaningful student engagement in enhancing learning outcomes. In a rapidly evolving higher education landscape, which is shaped by blended learning modalities, digital transformation, and the increasing integration of AI, there is a growing imperative to reimagine learning and teaching through intentional and contextually responsive innovation. This includes the comprehensive redesign of modules to align curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment; innovative classroom practices that foster active participation and deep engagement; transformative approaches to assessment that promote authentic, inclusive, and continuous learning; and the strategic integration of digital technologies to enhance access, flexibility, and learning analytics.

Equally important is the role of interdisciplinary collaboration in enabling more holistic and socially responsive forms of teaching and learning, where complex real-world challenges are addressed through integrated knowledge systems.

Collectively, these domains of innovation contribute to the enhancement of teaching quality and the cultivation of human-centred learning environments, which align with the conference theme of advancing learning and teaching for meaningful societal impact.

Submission Process

- Entries must be submitted as an online abstract.
- All abstracts will undergo a **selection and blind peer-review process**.
- Successful applicants will be invited to present at the Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference, where presentations will be reviewed to determine the winners in each sub-category.

Sub-categories

1.1 Innovation Through a Redesign or Renewal of a Module

This sub-category positions **module redesign or renewal** as a critical lever for advancing quality-enhanced, human-centred learning and teaching with demonstrable societal impact.

Submissions should demonstrate a **coherent and integrated redesign or renewal of a module**, with explicit alignment between learning outcomes, assessment strategies, learning activities, and teaching resources. Particular emphasis should be placed on constructive alignment, pedagogical intentionality, and the extent to which the redesign enhances student engagement, success, and meaningful learning within the UFS context.

Contributions are expected to illustrate how redesigned modules foster **inclusive, student-centred, and contextually responsive pedagogies**. This may include, but is not limited to, the integration of blended learning approaches, the embedding of graduate attributes, the incorporation of work-integrated and experiential learning opportunities, and the advancement of social justice, decolonisation, and epistemic inclusion.

Ultimately, submissions should demonstrate how module redesign or renewal prepares students to critically engage with complex, real-world challenges, thereby contributing to the broader goal of developing socially responsive and future-oriented graduates.

1.2 Innovation Through Classroom Practices to Enhance Student Engagement and Participation

This sub-category positions innovative classroom practices as a key mechanism for enhancing student engagement, participation, and attendance across face-to-face, online, and blended learning environments. It invites applications that critically engage with the design and facilitation of learning experiences that move beyond passive knowledge transmission towards active, participatory, and student-driven learning.

Applicants should demonstrate how specific teaching strategies, activities, or pedagogical interventions foster active learning, student agency, and meaningful engagement.

Submissions should:

- show evidence of impact on student engagement, participation, and/or attendance;
- demonstrate inclusive and motivating student learning environments; and
- reflect responsiveness to diverse student needs and foster a sense of belonging.

Examples of relevant approaches may include, but are not limited to, active learning strategies, peer and collaborative learning, flipped classroom models, and practices that connect disciplinary knowledge to real-world contexts. Collectively, these approaches should demonstrate how innovative classroom practices contribute to quality-enhanced, human-centred learning and teaching.

1.3 Innovation Through Assessment

This sub-category recognises innovative assessment practices as a central mechanism for advancing student learning, enabling meaningful feedback, and supporting the application of knowledge in authentic and contextually relevant ways. It positions assessment not merely as a measure of learning but as an integral component of the learning process itself.

Submissions should demonstrate how assessment is intentionally and coherently designed, with clear alignment to learning outcomes and teaching approaches, to promote active engagement in authentic disciplinary and professional contexts. Particular emphasis should be placed on assessment practices that foster deep learning, critical thinking, and student agency.

Submissions may include:

- alternative or authentic assessment approaches;
- integration of blended and online learning environments (including AI), graduate attributes, and inclusivity in assessment practices/strategies; and
- assessment strategies that prepare students for the world of work.

Strong submissions will provide evidence of impact on student learning and engagement, and demonstrate how innovative assessment practices contribute to human-centred learning environments and meaningful societal impact.

1.4 Innovation Through Technology and Digital Transformation

This sub-theme foregrounds the **pedagogically meaningful and ethically responsible integration of technology and digital transformation** as a catalyst for enhancing learning and teaching in higher education. It invites contributions that critically engage with the use of digital tools, platforms, and AI to enrich learning experiences, expand access, and foster collaboration within increasingly complex and technologised environments.

Examples may include:

- innovative use of learning management system (LMS) tools, digital platforms, or multimedia resources;
- AI in teaching, learning, or assessment;
- use of collaborative technologies and co-creation tools; and
- data-informed or adaptive learning approaches that personalise and support learning.

Strong submissions will demonstrate how technology-enabled practices contribute to human-centred learning environments, uphold the ethical and responsible use of digital innovations, and prepare graduates to navigate and contribute to a digitally complex and rapidly evolving world.

1.5 Innovation Through Interdisciplinary Collaboration

This sub-theme recognises innovation through interdisciplinary collaboration as a critical approach to enriching learning and teaching by integrating diverse disciplinary perspectives to address complex societal challenges. It foregrounds collaborative pedagogies that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and enable more holistic, contextually responsive, and problem-oriented learning experiences. Particular emphasis should be placed on how such teaching approaches enable students to synthesise knowledge across different disciplines, navigate complexity, and develop higher-order cognitive and collaborative skills.

Teams should demonstrate how interdisciplinary collaboration:

- enhances student learning and critical and integrative thinking;
- supports real-world problem solving; and
- contributes to the development of graduate attributes and prepares students for participation in diverse professional and societal contexts.

Strong submissions will reflect a human-centred orientation that demonstrates how interdisciplinary collaboration contributes to the development of socially responsive, ethically aware, and globally engaged graduates who are capable of addressing contemporary and future challenges.

Innovation in learning and teaching (all categories): Abstract requirements

- Entries must be submitted as an online abstract.
- Sub-categories 1.1–1.4: Individual or team entries (maximum of four members).
- Sub-category 1.5: Team entries only (maximum of four members).
- Abstract length: 300 to 350 words.
- Written in clear academic language.
- No references required.

Abstracts submitted under the Innovation in Learning and Teaching theme should address the following:

- **Teaching and learning context and innovation focus:** A clear description of the educational context (discipline, level, learning environment, or institutional setting; e.g., campus) and the learning and teaching challenge, opportunity, or area for quality enhancement that prompted the innovation.
- **Innovative, human-centred approach:** An outline of the innovative pedagogical strategy, curriculum design, assessment practice, technology-enabled approach, or interdisciplinary intervention that was designed, implemented, or explored, with explicit attention paid to how the needs, experiences, and agency of students and lecturers informed the innovation.
- **Evidence of enhancement and impact:** Reflection on, or evidence of, the impact of the innovation on learning, teaching practice, student engagement, success, employability, or the professional development of the academic. Contributions may draw on evaluation data, reflective practice, or scholarly inquiry.
- **Alignment with the conference theme:** A brief articulation of how the innovation advances quality-enhanced, human-centred learning and teaching and contributes to broader societal impact, transformation, or responsiveness in higher education.
- **Abstract link:** <https://abstractwiz.com/submission/signup/22/>
- **Submission date:** 28 June 2026, 23:59.

Portfolio Submission

The Research in Learning and Teaching category is divided into two sub-categories, namely emerging and advanced tracks.

- Entries are in the format of a **portfolio submission**.
- Applicants must present at the Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference.
- Portfolios and the applicants' presentations will be reviewed.

2.1 Emerging Track: Research in Learning and Teaching

The emerging research in the learning and teaching sub-theme aims to support and showcase academic and academic support staff who are at an early stage of developing a scholarly research profile in the field of learning and teaching.

This sub-theme recognises research-informed inquiry that enhances learning and teaching practices, foregrounds human-centred educational approaches, and demonstrates potential for meaningful societal or educational impact, even at an early stage of scholarly development.

Submissions will be evaluated based on one formal research output (a peer-reviewed journal article, full conference paper, book, or book chapter), accompanied by a reflective narrative. The narrative should contextualise the research within the applicant's teaching practice and clearly articulate the applicant's teaching philosophy and emerging scholarly identity in learning and teaching.

2.2 Advanced Track: Research in Learning and Teaching

The advanced research in learning and teaching sub-theme is designed for academic and academic support staff members with substantial experience and a sustained body of research outputs in the fields of learning, teaching, or higher education. This sub-theme aims to acknowledge the ongoing scholarly contributions of experienced researchers to the SoTL and related areas.

Applications will be reviewed based on a list of formal research outputs (such as peer-reviewed journal articles, full conference papers, books, or book chapters), accompanied by a scholarly narrative. This narrative should provide a critical exploration of the applicant's learning and teaching research, articulate a coherent teaching and research philosophy, and reflect on the significance, impact, and contribution of the research to human-centred learning and teaching and broader societal contexts.

Portfolio requirements:

- Entries are in the format of a **portfolio submission**.
- Entries may include individuals or teams (maximum of four team members).
- Narrative: 10 pages maximum.
- See the portfolio template as a guide.
- **Portfolio submission link:** <https://abstractwiz.com/submission/signup/24/>
- **Submission date: 26 July 2026, 23:59.**



Portfolio Submission

The Kovsie Phahamisa for SLPs category recognises excellence in the design, delivery, and continuous improvement of SLPs. It focuses on how effectively these programmes align with the needs of their target audience and how they promote meaningful, high-quality learning experiences.

Applicants will be assessed on their reflective and evidence-based practice in the SLP, their innovative and effective teaching and assessment approaches, and the support provided for participant learning and development. This category emphasises the importance of the quality and impact of SLPs at the UFS.

- Entries are in the format of a portfolio submission.
- Applicants must present at the Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference.
- Portfolios and the applicants' presentations will be reviewed.

Portfolio requirements:

- Entries are in the format of a **portfolio submission**.
- Entries may include individuals or teams (maximum of four team members).
- Narrative: 6 pages maximum. Appendices: 20 pages maximum.
- See the portfolio template as a guide.
- **Portfolio submission link:** <https://abstractwiz.com/submission/signup/24/>
- **Submission date:** 26 July 2026, 23:59.

Portfolio Submission

The Excellence in Learning and Teaching Support theme recognises and celebrates the outstanding contributions of academic support staff who play a critical role in advancing quality-enhanced, human-centred learning and teaching at the UFS.

This theme acknowledges academic support professionals whose work goes beyond routine service provision and demonstrates innovation, leadership, and a sustained commitment to enhancing the teaching and learning environment. Their contributions enable meaningful learning experiences, support academic staff and students in achieving their full potential, and contribute to institutional effectiveness and societal impact.

Submissions are invited from academic support staff who have designed, implemented, or led innovative practices, tools, systems, or partnerships that have significantly strengthened learning and teaching, as well as the support thereof at the UFS. Contributions may include, but are not limited to:

- The development or implementation of innovative systems, processes, or technologies that enhance learning and teaching in human-centred ways.
- Providing high-impact support to academic staff and/or students in learning and teaching practices or related research that enables improved educational quality and outcomes.
- Creating inclusive, accessible, and responsive learning environments that promote student success and a sense of belonging.
- Collaborative, cross-unit, or cross-institutional initiatives that strengthen the overall quality of learning and teaching.
- Demonstrating a sustained commitment to service excellence aligned with the UFS's learning and teaching vision, strategies, and priorities.

This theme highlights the essential role of academic support staff as partners in educational innovation and transformation, and as key contributors to human-centred learning and teaching for societal impact.

- Entries are in the format of a portfolio submission.
- Applicants must present at the Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference.
- Portfolios and the applicants' presentations will be reviewed.

Portfolio requirements:

- Entries are in the format of a **portfolio submission**.
- Entries may include individuals or teams (maximum of four team members).
- See the portfolio template as a guide.
- Narrative: 10 pages maximum. Appendices: 20 pages maximum.
- **Portfolio submission link:** <https://abstractwiz.com/submission/signup/24/>
- **Submission date: 26 July 2026, 23:59.**

Portfolio Submission

The Vice-Chancellor's Award for Learning and Teaching is the most prestigious category of the conference and recognises academic staff members who have demonstrated sustained, exceptional excellence in learning and teaching and who have made a significant and lasting impact within the UFS and beyond.

This award acknowledges scholars whose learning and teaching practices embody quality-enhanced, human-centred approaches and who have contributed meaningfully to student success, institutional transformation, and societal impact. Applicants' work should align with the UFS's vision, strategic objectives, and commitment to learning and teaching as a public good.

Entrants are required to submit a comprehensive, evidence-based teaching portfolio that demonstrates sustained excellence and leadership in learning and teaching over the past five years. The portfolio should provide robust evidence of impact at institutional, national, and/or international level, and reflect a coherent teaching philosophy, scholarly engagement, and contributions that advance human-centred learning and teaching for societal impact.

- Entries are in the format of a portfolio submission.
- Applicants must present at the Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference.
- Portfolios and the applicant's presentation will be reviewed.
- **Note: Only applicants with a score of above 70% will be eligible to receive the Vice-Chancellor's Award.**

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Academic staff members at the UFS who are actively involved in teaching.
2. Permanently employed academic staff members with a minimum of five years' teaching experience at the UFS.
3. Nomination by the Dean or Vice-Dean: Learning and Teaching of their faculty.

Portfolio requirements:

- Entries are in the format of a **portfolio submission**.
- The application must include the nomination by the Dean or Vice-Dean: Learning and Teaching (see the nomination form provided).
- Individual entries only.
- Narrative: 10 pages maximum, Appendices: 20 pages maximum.
- See the portfolio template as a guide.
- **Portfolio submission link:** <https://abstractwiz.com/submission/signup/24/>
- **Submission date: 26 July 2026, 23:59.**



OVERALL CRITERIA

UFS Learning and Teaching Conference

- Cross-campus collaboration is permitted.
- An applicant (individual or team) is limited to a total of two entries across all categories.
- Each entry must be unique; the same project and/or study cannot be submitted multiple times to different categories.
- A project and/or study that has been previously entered and/or has previously received awards can be submitted again for the 2026 awards. It must, however, have evolved in some way, been adjusted over time, or present new/updated findings and contributions.
- The selection and review process will be conducted by a panel of institutional and external experts in the field of learning and teaching. The entries for all categories will be evaluated according to the criteria outlined in the relevant rubrics.
- Applicants should use the award category rubrics to guide the formulation of their entries.
- Please [click here](#) to access the online submission guidelines, rubrics.
- Incomplete applications will not be considered.
- Abstract submission due date **26 June, 23:59**
- Portfolio submission due date **28 July, 23:59**

LEARNING AND TEACHING REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR 2026

The review panel may consist of, but is not limited to, Vice-Deans: Teaching and Learning, Faculty Teaching and Learning Managers, Academic Support Professionals, members of the CTL management, previous award winners, and external reviewers from other national/international higher education institutions.

REVIEW PROCESS

- All submissions will be evaluated by a panel of reviewers using established rubrics to ensure a fair, transparent, and valid review process. (Applicants are encouraged to consult the rubrics to guide their submissions.)
- **Innovation in Learning and Teaching Awards:** This category follows a two-stage review process:
 1. Abstract review: Submitted abstracts will undergo a blind peer-review process to determine which applicants will be selected to present at the conference.
 2. Presentation review: Selected candidates will be evaluated during a live review of their conference presentations, which will inform the final selection of award recipients.
- **Portfolio-Based Awards:** Submissions will be evaluated based on the submitted portfolio, followed by a live review of the applicant's presentation.
- The review panel reserves the right not to confer an award if the required standard of excellence is not met.

THE AWARDS

- All applicants will be invited the Annual UFS Exceptional Academic Achievers Awards on **29 October 2026**.
- All award winners and runners-up will be announced at the awards ceremony, as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Winners in each category are incentivised as follows:

	1 st Place	2 nd Place
Innovating Through a Complete Module Redesign	R10 000	R5 000
Innovating Through Classroom Practices to Enhance Student Engagement and Participation	R10 000	R5 000
Innovating Through Assessment	R10 000	R5 000
Innovating Through Technology and Digital Transformation	R10 000	R5 000
Innovation Through Interdisciplinary Collaborations	R10 000	R5 000
Kovsie Phahamisa Award for SLPs	R10 000	R5 000
Excellence in Learning and Teaching Support	R10 000	R5 000
Research in Learning and Teaching: Advanced	R10 000	R5 000
Research in Learning and Teaching: Emerging	R10 000	R5 000
Best Innovation in Learning and Teaching conference paper	BFN/SC R10 000	QQ R10 000
Vice-Chancellor's Award in Learning and Teaching	R25 000	

**Incentives are intended to be used for research purposes and will only be paid into the recipient's research entity.*

Should you require more clarity or information regarding the awards or the conference, please contact Thuto Mvimbe (mvimbetl@ufs.ac.za) or Dalene Meintjes (meintjesm@ufs.ac.za).

Receiving of awards:

- Up to 22 awards may be given in total across all six conference categories.
- Reviewers reserve the right not to confer a specific award. If a category receives only two entries, the reviewers may decide whether to award a second place based on the merit and quality of the entries.
- Please note that the best Qwaqwa and the best Bloemfontein/South campus conference paper presentations in the Innovation in Learning and Teaching category will each receive an award. The winners will be determined by the scores of the live reviews during the conference.
- Award winners will receive a monetary incentive, which will be paid into their research entity.
- In the case of a team entry and/or a tie, the award money will be divided equally among the recipients.
- Award recipients are kindly requested to supply the organising team with a research entity number to complete an entity transfer.

SUBMISSION AND EVALUATION DATES

All abstract and portfolio entries need to be submitted by the following deadlines:

- Abstracts: **28 June** (with feedback by end of **July**); and
- Portfolios: **26 July** (with feedback on eligibility by early August)

Entries are evaluated according to rubric criteria:

- Rubrics will be shared with applicants.
- No fewer than three reviewers are selected per category.

We look forward to receiving your submission!



Reference list

- Biggs, J. and Tang, C., 2011. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 4th ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Billett, S., 2021. Integrating practice-based experiences into higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 43(2), pp.127–140.
- Holmes, W., Bialik, M. and Fadel, C., 2019. *Artificial Intelligence in Education: Promises and Implications for Teaching and Learning*. Boston: Center for Curriculum Redesign.
- Holmes, W. and Tuomi, I., 2022. State of the art and practice in AI in education. *European Journal of Education*, 57(4), 542–570.
- Jackson, D., 2015. Employability skill development in work-integrated learning: Barriers and best practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(2), 350–367.
- Porayska-Pomsta, K., Holmes, W. and Nemorin, S., 2024. The ethics of AI in education. arXiv, 2406.11842.
- Trigwell, K., 2012. Relations between teaching quality and student learning outcomes. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(2), 205–217.

