

Empowering women young

BY IGNO VAN NIEKERK

The UFS is committed to supporting women and young academics by creating opportunities for growth, leadership, and meaningful academic contributions. Through targeted mentoring programmes, the university aims to break down barriers, promote equality, and grow the next generation of scholars and leaders.

The Transformation of the Professoriate Mentoring Programme, launched five years ago, plays an important role in this effort. This initiative equips emerging scholars with the tools needed to excel in teaching, research, community engagement, and leadership. Dr Henriette van den Berg, Manager of the Transformation of the Professoriate Mentoring Programme, highlights that “the women who participate in the mentoring programme overcome many barriers to achieve exceptionally well in their academic roles. Many have won institutional awards for

teaching and learning excellence, recognition for their exceptional research productivity and impact, and accolades for their broader societal influence as leaders of national and international professional bodies. They serve as an inspiration to both students and the university community.” With most participants being women, the programme reflects the UFS’ dedication to gender parity and academic excellence.

An important branch of the programme is the newly launched Women Influencing Scholarship and Education (WISE) initiative, which inspires mid-career women academics to pursue leadership roles. WISE helps participants build personal branding skills, strengthen their digital presence, and improve their communication and presentation skills. Through these initiatives, women are empowered to advance their careers and make meaningful contributions to their fields.

For promising young academics, the Emerging Scholar Accelerator Programme (ESAP) prepares early-career academics

Standing from the left, are Prof Adré Minnaar-Ontong; Dr Mamontsuo Lintle Maraisane; Dr Ijeoma Ogbonnaya; Prof Liezel Lues; Dr Ntombizandile Gcelu; Dr Lulama Mdozana-Zide; and Dr Makoena Joyce Moloji. Sitting from the left, are Dr Marda Horn; Dr Mpho Chipu; Dr Adri O’Neill; and Dr Oyinlola Adebola.

Photos: Sonia Small

and academics at the UFS

for future leadership roles and entry into the Future Professoriate Group. ESAP offers integrated activities, allowing participants from various faculties to connect, share experiences, and learn from one another. Individual career plans are developed to guide participants towards important milestones, such as achieving National Research Foundation (NRF) ratings, receiving international fellowships, completing PhD programmes, and gaining recognition for excellence in teaching and scholarship.

The university also offers the Future Professoriate Group, designed for academics ready to take the next step in their academic journey. Participants benefit from individual mentoring, writing retreats, and leadership training. Alumni of the programme return as mentors, creating a continuous cycle of learning and mentorship.

“Empowering women and young academics are not just an investment in individual potential, but an essential step towards fostering resilience, innovation, and progress in academia and beyond. I am confident that these programmes and initiatives will

help develop the strengths of our women and young academics to enable them to make their mark,” said Prof Vasu Reddy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation at the UFS.

These initiatives are already showing results. Over the past five years, 110 candidates have participated, with 70% of candidates being black South African or African-born academics. The achievements include 315 academic articles, 30 books, and 22 prestigious research grants. Women currently make up 77% of the ESAP participants, and the Future Professoriate Group has seen a 73% success rate measured by promotions.

The UFS believes that academic success is built on community, collaboration, and opportunity. As participants grow into leaders and mentors, they inspire future generations to dream bigger and aim higher. The university remains committed to building an inclusive, vibrant academic environment where every voice has a chance to shape the future. **b**

Standing from the left, are Dr Nomakhuwe Tabane; Dr Frelet de Villiers; Dr Somarie Holtzhausen; Dr Marinda Avenant; Dr Shirley du Plooy; Dr Karen Ehlers; and Dr Ekaete Benedict. Sitting from the left, are Dr Alba du Toit; Dr Martha Khosa; Dr Marlie van Rooyen; and Dr Nokuthula Tinta.

