



## DR LOURENS MAKING A MEANINGFUL MARK IN ACADEMIA & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

It was in 1995 when Dr Melanie Elizabeth Lourens, Faculty of Management Studies Deputy Dean joined what was then known as ML Sultan Technikon, now the Durban University of Technology to work as an Administrative Assistant in the Student Admissions Department after studying at the institution. In 1991 she enrolled at what was then Technikon Natal to study for her first qualification, National Diploma in Human Resources Management. She completed her HRM undergraduate studies in 1993. Thereafter, Dr Lourens took a part-time post in June 1995 and began lecturing within the Human Resources Management Department.

Proving to be a woman with vision and ambition, in June 1997 she became a permanent member of staff. Now boasting 28 years at DUT, Dr Lourens has served as the Head of Department of Human Resources Management from 2007 to 2020. When asked what she likes about her current position, the FMS Deputy Dean who listens to music when she's not working simply says: "Problem-solving and ensuring customer satisfaction". These are personality traits any passionate and dedicated employee should strive for. If you are wondering what a typical day is like for a Deputy Dean at DUT's biggest faculty, Dr Lourens says there is no typical day in academia or management.

Dr Lourens was born and raised in Durban by her father who was of German heritage and mother who is Afrikaans. Recognised locally and internationally for her teaching excellence she says her mother has had the strongest influence in her life. Locally, Dr Lourens has on numerous occasions been invited as a guest lecturer at Esayidi TVET College: Southern KZN Region. Internationally, she has served as a guest lecturer at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi, India and the Anna University in Chennai, India. Whether working with the young or old Dr Lourens puts in the work, commitment and dedication. She has lectured in Research Methodology since 2004 and in the last four years alone has witnessed the successful completion of this module with over 300 learners as per her exam mark sheets, examiner and moderator reports. Proving that women can do it all and excel, Dr Lourens has published 20 journal Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) articles and has co-



**Pictured:** Dr Melanie Elizabeth Lourens  
**IMAGE SOURCE:** IFRRA Website

authored three books which are still currently under review. Over the years she has been actively involved in curriculum design and development in the Human Resources Management Department, however, her commitment to educational development stretches out of DUT. As part of her community development, Dr Lourens is a judge for the KZN Physical Regional Expo for Young Scientists and has been serving on the Esayidi TVET College: Southern KZN Region Advisory Board since 2017. Dr Lourens is also a member of the Institute of People Management and the South African Human Resource University Forum, a body that encourages collaboration amongst HR academics in South Africa.

"This too shall pass" are the words she lives by especially when confronted with challenges. Dr Lourens wants to be remembered as someone who made a small difference in people's lives, but we can all certainly agree that there is nothing small about successfully graduating 24 Masters and five Doctorates, and examining 11 Masters and five Doctorates. So how does a woman start as an Administrative Assistant and now occupies the position of Deputy Dean, in the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Durban University of Technology, one of KZN's two universities of technology? Addressing young women with similar ambitions Dr Lourens, a proud animal lover says, "Don't stress about the small stuff – stay focused."

# SISIKA

## KWELINONILE

(THE BEST STORIES BEING TOLD)



The latest faculty news, views and announcements

WOMEN'S MONTH SPECIAL

### DR MAHARAJ IS A PASSIONATE ACADEMIC DEDICATED TO FAMILY AND DUT

"A friendly, happy, nurturing, optimistic and glamorous person" was the Durban University of Technology Senior Marketing Lecturer, Dr Mandusha Maharaj's response, when she was asked how her colleagues would best describe her. Dr Maharaj joined what was then ML Sultan Technikon, now the Durban University of Technology in 1988. The firstborn daughter to parents Mrs Poonitha Gangaram and late father Mr Nanthlall Gangaram, Dr Maharaj obtained her first qualification, a BCom Specialising in Business Management at the University of Durban Westville, now known as the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In the year 2000, she obtained her Master of Commerce at Potchefstroom Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, a university which later merged with other institutions to form North-West University.

"My parents did not have an opportunity to engage in higher education. They motivated me to persevere in furthering my education," says Dr Maharaj.

Dr Maharaj recalls her doctoral journey as a very challenging period. "My dad had a heart surgery bypass and two years later had renal failure. After my dad passed on in 2004 my mum experienced depression and had open heart surgery". Dr Maharaj persevered through it all and in 2010 she was conferred with her doctoral degree (Commerce) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

As a child, she spent many of her weekends and vacations with her maternal grandparents who lived on a farm in Isenembe, upper Tongaat. "As the eldest of three siblings, like all traditional Hindu households, my childhood consisted of assisting with household chores and taking care of my siblings my grandma and extended family," says Dr Maharaj. Sunday mornings were spent at weekly Satsang/ prayer meetings thereafter she would visit her grandmother who lived in Avoca, Durban. In 1980, Dr Maharaj married her husband Dan Maharaj. She proudly highlights that their social life is family focused with their youngest son still living with them. Dr Maharaj is now a grandmother to three grandchildren born to her three children.

At DUT, her motherly care is felt as she lectures undergraduate students in the Marketing and Retail Management Department. She also provides supervision to Masters and PhD Management Sciences postgraduate students. She has seen the successful completion of five doctoral and nine master's studies. A total of six postgraduate study projects are still in progress. The highlight of her strong supervision experience was between the years 2018 to 2019, when four PhD and two master's postgraduate students successfully obtained their qualifications.



**Pictured:** Dr Mandusha Maharaj  
**Image source:** DUT Website

Her postgraduate examination experience includes working with candidates from UKZN, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and MANCOSA.

Dr Maharaj has also appeared at several conferences. In 2016 she presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Economics and Social Sciences (ICESS-2016). If her career was not in academia, Dr Maharaj says she would have been a businesswoman. Societal matters such as gender violence, poverty, graduate unemployment and partnering with industry are some of the causes that are close to her heart. She also mentions religion and spirituality. "My spiritual mentors have inspired and motivated every aspect of my life. They have taught me to always strive for excellence" she said.

So how does an academic with decades of experience unwind? Dr Maharaj enjoys walking on the beach, reading and listening to music.

"My day commences with preparing meals for my family. Thereafter, I engage in prayer and then focus on my university work. My day ends with evening hymns, meditation and scripture reading." The brilliant academic who passed her doctoral examination with no corrections spends evenings engaging in family chats whilst watching her favourite television programmes. Dr Maharaj reveals cooking and baking as some of her hidden talents. From a spiritual perspective, she intends to engage in meditation more intensively.

As Dr Maharaj continues to share her life and knowledge with DUT students and staff, who commend her organisational and leadership skills, in honour of her memory one day, she would appreciate it if people learnt from her mistakes and achievements. She indicated that learning something new every day, especially in the digital world of work is also an enjoyable experience for her.

# SISIKA KWELINONILE

(THE BEST STORIES BEING TOLD)



The latest faculty news, views and announcements

WOMEN'S MONTH SPECIAL

## INTRODUCING FMS'S VERY OWN CONQUEROR, DR SUCHERAN

***"Strong women aren't born, they're forged in the fires they've had to walk through. They're warriors with hearts of gold."*** Silver Ravenwolf

A powerful quote that fits perfectly when one thinks of Dr Reshma Sucheran, Durban University of Technology Department of Hospitality and Tourism Senior Lecturer and Research Chair. She was born and raised in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, in what she describes as a "very humble household and in a close-knit and conservative family". As a child, many of her days were spent on family picnics at the beach, fishing with her father and cooking with her mother. A lot of her childhood was also spent reading teenage fiction books, "I read every Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys series". Married young, she was only 21 years old when her first daughter was born.

In 1994 Dr Sucheran obtained her first qualification which was a BA degree from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. "I started my first year at university as a full-time student when my firstborn was a year old. My second daughter was born a month after I completed my Honours degree and I went on immediately thereafter and commenced with my Master's degree," says Dr Sucheran who majored in Geography and Fine Art. Demonstrating that when vision and hard work meet magic happens, in 1995 she completed her BA Honours Geography, Masters in 2000 and PhD Geography and Environmental Management in the year 2013.

"My husband has been my pillar of strength and my biggest supporter throughout and had often played the role of both mum and dad for me to fulfil my educational aspirations," said Dr Sucheran who attributes her academic achievements to her life partner who remains her biggest cheerleader. The mother of two daughters says her children have always influenced her to be a worthy person in both her career and personal life.

A hard worker of note, completing all her degrees whilst raising two daughters remains what she labels "first greatest achievement." She admits it was an extremely challenging academic journey with little social support. "These were indeed our most gruelling years, but undoubtedly a journey of strength, worth and triumph." reflects Dr Sucheran whose list of achievements in academia has continued to grow over the years.

"My second greatest academic achievement was being awarded a prestigious scholarship to attend the Summer School in Research Methodology at University of Michigan, USA. I attended this program in 1997, 1998 and 1999 and this is where my enthusiasm for academic research was further stimulated," said Dr Sucheran who claims if she did not end up in academia she would have most probably pursued a career in law. "Apart from being an ardent believer of fairness and justice, I am a Libran, the justice-minded sun sign," she explained.

For three consecutive years, 2020, 2021 and 2022 Dr Sucheran has walked away with the Advancing Women in Research and Innovation Award. "This award programme is part of the Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate's objective to empower women researchers from the various disciplines at DUT. The award offers



Pictured: **Dr Reshma Sucheran**  
Image supplied

opportunities for women to find sustainable solutions that address the shortage of women in STEM, as well as become leaders and role models for female researchers," she said.

Being the first recipient of this award enabled her to publish a total of six research papers in DHET accredited journals in one year. "This award has made me recognize my untapped research potential and certainly serves as an impetus for my future research and academic aspirations," says Dr Sucheran who spends her early evenings either cooking or having playtime moments with her two-year old grandson.

As we honour Women's Month Dr Sucheran's message to young women was lengthy and powerful. "As a woman and an academic, and by leading through example, I always encourage younger females, to vigorously pursue higher education and to become addicted to constant and never-ending self-improvement. While there is still a long way to go to shatter more glass ceilings, women are making great strides in academia and demonstrating considerable innovation and advancements in research. I believe that women should support and celebrate each other. Often, behind every great woman is another great woman."

To women with similar goals Dr Sucheran says, "Although the road to success is not easy to navigate, you can do anything as long as you have the passion, the focus, and the support. Our young girls should also realise their value and know that they are deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve their dreams. Don't judge your success by the standards of others. Decide what your strengths and goals are and use that as your measure instead. Be prepared to fail but walk from failure with no loss of enthusiasm and succeed by always embracing ethics and integrity."

# SISIKA

## KWELINONILE

(THE BEST STORIES BEING TOLD)



The latest faculty news, views and announcements

WOMEN'S MONTH SPECIAL

### Dr Okeke-Uzodike Boasts a Brave and Inspiring Journey into Academia

One would think photographer Chris Grosser had Dr Obianuju Okeke-Uzodike, Durban University of Technology Department of Applied Management, Senior Lecturer in mind when he said, "Opportunities don't happen, you create them." The story of how Dr Obianuju Okeke-Uzodike, found herself in academia is interesting. Born and raised in Nnewi in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, into what she refers to as a nuclear family of seven members (two older brothers and two younger sisters), she obtained her primary and secondary education in Nnewi.

"Although Nnewi is well known across Nigeria for its bustling motor spare parts business activities, growing up there (in retrospect) was challenging. Luckily, strong parental love and guidance provided ample cushion and emotional support for myself and my siblings to push through difficult times," says Dr Okeke-Uzodike. Her late father worked with the Ministry of Lands, Survey and Town Planning whilst her mother retired as a schoolteacher.

After secondary school, Dr Okeke-Uzodike's higher education journey began at Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) where she enrolled in a Chemical Engineering course. "Although I wanted to study medicine, I was compelled by the crowded demands in that field of study across Nigeria to enlist for Chemical Engineering," explains Dr Okeke-Uzodike who went through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program after obtaining her engineering degree. She reveals that the NYSC program is a one-year mandatory service for all Nigerian university graduates, "Essentially, the NYSC program is intended as an instrument for facilitating integration, nation-building and national development in an otherwise divided societal environment. It sought to emphasize and instill ideas of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians regardless of cultural, religious or social differences and backgrounds." Dr Okeke-Uzodike's NYSC service was at a Water Plant at the Kaduna Refinery of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.

In 2004, she completed her Master's degree in Business Administration at the ESUT Business School in Lagos, Nigeria. At the time, becoming a lecturer was not something she had envisioned for herself. "I never really aspired to be a university lecturer; it never crossed my mind despite having a parent who was a professional teacher."

According to Dr Okeke-Uzodike, her internship experience at the Oil and Gas firm, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in Nigeria mentally prepared her for teaching. "After completing the NYSC, my chances of getting full-time employment in an oil and gas firm seemed low in a tight labour market. I was ready for any job opportunity. I secured a job in a new start-up IT firm which never came into full operational capacity." said the married mother of four whose husband is an academic at a South African university.

"My quest for knowledge drove me towards pursuing a Doctoral study in Management, given my existing Master's degree in the same field. But before then, I had wanted to pursue another Master's degree in Engineering Management, but unfortunately was not being offered in the institutions I had contacted at the time." Dr Okeke-Uzodike then decided to pursue her PhD degree in Management (Human Resources Management) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. "Whilst studying for my PhD at UKZN, I became immersed in academic discussions, attended academic events and at some point, started tutoring at the university." In January 2017, Dr Okeke-Uzodike began working at DUT



Pictured: **Dr Obianuju Okeke-Uzodike**  
Image Supplied

as a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Applied Management, Riverside Campus. Before this, she was a part-time lecturer at UKZN, Pietermaritzburg Campus. A life that seems to be all about books, self-empowerment, and growth. If she is not working, Dr Okeke-Uzodike, finds pleasure in catching up on what's happening in current affairs and social media. She also enjoys attending events such as weddings, birthday parties and exercising.

"Ambitious, driven and dedicated" are the three words she says best describes her. It is evident, as this is a woman whose teaching journey has also seen her tutor both primary and secondary school students. Teaching secondary school students struggling, especially in science related subjects and tutoring primary school kids in English Language (especially reading) and Mathematics was part of her community service whilst awaiting admission into university. "I built on that and peer reviewed at the time to find a ground in academia. Over time, with mentorship and personal development, I discovered that I could build a career in academia, which I am doing to date," says Dr Okeke-Uzodike.

As she celebrates six years at DUT, some of her career highlights as a woman in academia is receiving a nomination during the 2019 DUT Research and Innovation Awards under the *Faculty Researcher of the Year* category. In 2020, Dr Okeke-Uzodike appeared in the Mercury Newspaper following a nomination as one of the women making an impact at the Durban University of Technology. Last year she received a recognition award for her contributions to the Faculty of Management Sciences. She has written two book chapters, about 20 articles in a peer-reviewed journal and has graduated more than 20 postgraduate students.

"Go beyond the limit and change lives." are the words she lives by; to young females who share similar aspirations, she says, "Young women should not relent, let's work together to pull down the glass ceiling that limit our potentials."

# SISIKA KWELINONILE

(THE BEST STORIES BEING TOLD)



The latest faculty news, views and announcements

WOMEN'S MONTH SPECIAL

## A MOMENT WITH FMS's GLOBALLY RECOGNISED GEM, PROFESSOR NIRMALA DORASAMY

A quick Google-scholar search of the name Professor Nirmala Dorasamy, Durban University of Technology, Department of Public Management and Economics Lecturer, Postgraduate Supervisor and Researcher, is occasioned by a display of an array of pages of journal articles and books with a global citation index.

Professor Dorasamy was born in Durban, where she and two siblings were raised by their widowed mother. "I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth, hence I firmly live by the mantra: *hard work never kills*", she shares when asked about her childhood and family life. She joined DUT in 2008, she was drawn into academia by her passion for research especially within a diverse global research community.

According to her biography on the official DUT website, Professor Dorasamy's focus area in research is ethics and public sector management, with an emphasis on enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery underpinned by a strong sense of governance within a democratic dispensation. "The opportunities granted by DUT to established researchers in terms of formalising MOUs for research collaboration, engaging with local and international postgraduate students/academics, pursuing an international research footprint, and being able to lecture to students across various programme levels and pillars of diversity." is what the NRF rated researcher and mother of one son says she likes most about her job.

Over the years, Professor Dorasamy has achieved six qualifications after obtaining her first (B. Paed Arts) at what was previously known as the University of Durban-Westville, now the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). She has established international linkages in collaborative research with Swinburne University of Technology, Federation University, Australia, Monash University, Australia, MUST University, Kenya, Mendel University, Czech Republic, and The American University in Cairo.

"Morning prayer, meditation, gym, fulfilling my roles and responsibilities as a DUT academic/ researcher/ supervisor, and undertaking general domestic tasks." sums up a typical day for her. Highlighting her greatest successes as a female academic, she said, "Being able to graduate so many students, especially women from severely disadvantaged backgrounds in various parts of Africa. More so, having established long-lasting mentoring relationships with my students/colleagues is a testimony of the thirst for lifelong learning from individuals at various rungs on the ladder of learning. It humbles me to continue to engage with them in their trajectory of knowledge



Pictured: **Professor Nirmala Dorasamy with one of her students from DUT's FMS.** Image Supplied

development." She states if her career did not lead her into academia, she would be working with a disadvantaged community, offering her services towards the upliftment of such communities. Helping disadvantaged children, encouraging the poor to uplift themselves, and inculcating enhanced spirituality among people toward holistic wellness are some of the causes she cares most about. It comes as no surprise as she says, "Simple, loving, and empathetic" are the three words that best describe her.

During the 2020 DUT Staff Awards and Annual Research and Innovation Awards, Professor Dorasamy walked away as the winner of the Senior Researcher of the Year award, (Platinum) Faculty Researcher of the Year Award and (Silver) for Top University Journal Publishers for Accredited Outputs. "Difficult one... but maybe helpful, altruistic, student centred and always trying to beat time." was her humble response when asked how she thinks her DUT colleagues would best describe her. She lives by the words, "*Success is not reserved for special people. It is out there waiting for those who are prepared to embark on a journey to reach a wonderful destination called MAKING SUCCESS A REALITY FROM DREAMS.*"

As office conversations slowly shift to what to wear for the coming month's Heritage Day, maybe a chat with Professor Dorasamy will be helpful as dress making and interior décor are her hidden talents.

To young women who aspire to be the Professor Nirmala Dorasamys' of tomorrow she says, "Remain bold in the face of adversity. When feeling overwhelmed, always reach out. Never allow problems to mitigate your success. Always surround yourself with good energy, be it listening to the waves, exercising, and even eating healthily. A healthy lifestyle is a potent ingredient for success in other spheres of our lives."

# SISIKA

## KWELINONILE

(THE BEST STORIES BEING TOLD)



The latest faculty news, views and announcements

WOMEN'S MONTH SPECIAL

### PROFESSOR HLENGWA: COMMITTED TO THE CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIA

Born in Pietermaritzburg, Professor Dumsile Cynthia Hlengwa, joined the Durban University of Technology Department of Ecotourism in 2007. Last year she bowed out as Ecotourism's Head of Department after serving almost three terms. "I am currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Ecotourism, lecturing Advanced Strategic Management 401, Research Methodology 401, Project Management 401 and Ecotourism Management 201. I am committed to my students success and endeavour to provide them with the necessary teaching and learning tools to succeed." says Professor Hlengwa as she explains what her work entails.

Amongst her many duties, Professor Hlengwa also ensures that the department collaborates with other local universities in terms of teaching, assessment, supervision, moderation, curriculum development and postgraduate examination.

Since 2008, Professor Hlengwa continues the crucial role of supporting Advanced Diploma students to develop their research skills. She also plays a key role in introducing students to field experts as a member of TESA (Tourism Education South Africa). Committed to the success of students and the department, she has engaged in the internationalisation of the Department of Ecotourism.

In 2017 she was part of a delegation to Germany (the Ravensburg University of Cooperative Education and Munich University of Applied Sciences) and consequently hosted German Professors who came to visit and give lectures to students. "I promote the university's decoloniality agenda by incorporating indigenous knowledge in my teaching activities; I also published a paper titled: Infusion of indigenous knowledge into the teaching of ecotourism entrepreneurship in 2019," explains Professor Hlengwa.

She has received numerous accolades, the latest being Faculty Researcher of the Year (Gold Category) for research output. In May 2022, she was nominated by the DVC-Academic to represent DUT at THENSA (Technological Higher Education Network South Africa). She represented DUT on the THENSA-funded tour to Galway, Ireland for an intensive workshop to develop a recovery strategy for the tourism industry in South Africa using specifically online training and staff development.

A second-born child in her family, Professor Hlengwa also provides postgraduate supervision. She has graduated seven Master's (8<sup>th</sup> currently submitted for examination) and one doctoral student. She's currently the sole supervisor to eight (5 Master's and 3 PhD) postgraduate students. Professor Hlengwa has presented at various conferences. In 2019



Pictured: **Professor Dumsile Cynthia Hlengwa**  
Image Supplied

she attended an international conference hosted by the Athens Institute for Education and Research in Athens (ATINER), Greece. She presented a paper on the Integration of indigenous knowledge into the teaching and learning of ecotourism in higher education. As a member of ATINER, the President asked her to chair one of the sessions.

Before that, in 2018, as a member of the Scientific Review Committee, she attended an international conference organised by the International Tourism Studies Association (ITSA) at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research CSIR in Pretoria, South Africa. That same year, Professor Hlengwa received an invite as a guest speaker at the FET first Provincial Tourism and Hospitality TVET Imbizo in Durban, eThekweni TVET College.

The NRF Reviewer for DUT applicants is active in community service and is currently involved with a group from Willowfontein outside of Pietermaritzburg's Imbali Township in its tourism development initiative. She is also connecting the group with other stakeholders.

Professor Hlengwa was the only woman amongst five professors that were appointed in 2021 in the faculty. She is an inspiration to many young and upcoming female academics in the university and the country at large.