

Empower yourself and others at a unique Women's Month event

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The 19th annual Women in Business Conference organised by students at the UCT Graduate School of Business on 17 August, offers women a day of networking and inspiration while raising funds for those without financial means to pursue a world-class education at the institution.



This August, students at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) have assembled a compelling line-up of women business leaders and entrepreneurs, who embody passion and perseverance and whose stories will help galvanise others, to speak at its annual Women in Business Conference.

“As women we all know what it feels like to encounter prejudice and feel discouraged,” says Minerva Draeger, Co-Chair of this year’s event and a student at the GSB. “We want the stories of our speakers to ignite the spark that moves women out of their comfort zone, lights the fire that catalyses a willingness to grow and change, and pushes them to think in new ways and forge new pathways. It is in these fresh spaces and territories that real change is made.”

The annual GSB conference is unique in that for 19 years, it has been organised and managed by students, like Draeger, who take time out of their hectic academic schedules to organise and host the event. Bringing inspirational and pioneering leaders from various business sectors to share their expertise and learning, the conference provides an exceptional platform for businesswomen to connect and engage, build networks and share knowledge.

Draeger points out that another unusual dimension of the event is that it seeks to raise funds for bursaries so that disadvantaged women, who do not have the financial means, can embark on one of the academic programmes at the GSB. “This year we are adding an entrepreneurial dimension to the conference,” she says. “Previously, the principal focus has been on women’s advancement in the corporate world where women are still under-represented at every level of the corporate ladder. In fact, in Africa, only 5% of CEOs are women! So while there is still much to do in equipping women for the challenges of the corporate landscape, there is a need to inspire and empower potential entrepreneurs to step out and impact their environment.”

Speakers have been chosen not only for their expertise, but to share the key lessons gained through overcoming their own challenges so that in addition to being inspired and motivated, delegates can assimilate information they can apply in their own career paths.

The speakers are all highly successful women in their fields who have achieved their positions through overcoming what to most would seem insurmountable socio-economic and cultural challenges.

They include: **Mimi Kalinda**, co-founder and MD of Africa Communications Media Group; **Makoma Lekalakala** of Earthlife Africa, who was instrumental in reversing the nuclear deal with the Russian government; **Naadiya Moosajee**, co-founder of

WomEng & WomHub, promoting women into the engineering and tech industries; **Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng**, Vice-Chancellor at UCT and founder of the Adopt-a-Learner Foundation; **Gaby Prinsloo**, medical doctor and executive coach; **Magda Wierzycka**, CEO of Sygnia Financial Services, whose assets she grew from R2bn to R184bn in 12 years; and **Prof Shirley Zinn** who has risen from the unforgiving Cape Flats to the top of business leadership in South Africa.

“It is a high-powered and impressive line-up of women business leaders and entrepreneurs,” says Draeger.

“All of them have faced obstacles of prejudice, funding, vested interests, capacity and simply belief in their vision. Yet with that indefinable quality called ‘passion’, married with dogged perseverance and hard work, they have determinedly pushed through and become agents of change. This is what we wish to inspire in our delegates: that following your passion is possible and that through this, bold action and real and lasting change can be made. It is obviously fitting that the conference is held during Women’s Month!”

More information about the Conference is available on the Women in Business Facebook group or email wibconference@gsb.uct.ac.za.

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