

The University of Pretoria (UP), including its business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), will award degrees to more than 10 400 graduates at this year’s Autumn Graduation ceremonies, starting on 14 April 2015.

A total of 134 doctorate degrees, 1 187 master’s degrees and 2 957 honours degrees are to be awarded. Five individuals, who have made notable contributions in their field of expertise, will be recognized by awarding them honorary doctorate degrees.

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**17 APRIL 2015**

**Problem Solving SA’s Education System**

South Africa faces a crisis in the education

sector where the demand for good teachers

outstrips the availability of qualified professionals.

Researchers at the University of Pretoria (UP)

have found unique solutions to the country’s

education woes. These solutions could affect

policy and have an impact on the country’s future.

The collection of research findings produced by PhD candidates who graduated at UP’s autumn graduation ceremony include ways on how to harness the knowledge and experiential skills of retired educators to benefit current teachers; looking at what leadership practices set principals of successful schools apart; lawful, reasonable and fair decisions in disciplinary cases and understanding and implementing due processes in disciplinary issues; and school leadership programmes for principals.

The studies touch on the core of some of the most pressing concerns facing the education sector. Prof Irma Eloff, Dean of the Faculty of Education at UP, says of the studies, “The excellent research by our PhD-students are commended by international external examiners. It is often lauded for the theoretical depth, fluent methodological designs and the pragmatic insights it offers for the education profession and the successful functioning of schools”.

With ever increasing numbers of teachers leaving the profession, retired teachers have much to offer in terms of their many years of experience and understanding. It is believed that their experiences can inform career development programmes in schools. According to Dr Hildah Mokgolodi, “Retired teachers placed high values on soft skills like self-awareness, leadership and mentoring. It was found that mentoring and carefully mapping exit interviews of retired teachers could result in harnessing the competencies of educators for the benefit of learners and other educators”.

South African schools ranked according to the Annual National Assessments report show dire deficiencies in basic communication skills, problem solving and analytical thinking. These are skills which need to be developed in primary schools. However, it was found that in schools which are successful in producing learners with these skills that there was a link between the principal’s leadership practices and the learners’ output. These principals led in daunting accountability, and standards-driven environments. Principals were focussed on aligning and motivating their people to a common vision that strongly correlated with the principal’s personal aspirations, the inside-out approach that links personal performance to organisational performance.

“These principals meaningfully engaged the staff in quality professional development, and were particular about the working environments of teachers which translate to the learning environment of learners”, says Dr Bishum Parag. Their innovative leadership practices that strongly focused on the core business of learning and teaching (instruction) were characterised by open communication, collaboration, trust, integrity and democratic decision making with close consultation between principals and their management teams.

“Leadership programmes for principals were also investigated and a model for an effective leadership programme was suggested,” explains Dr Ephraim Kgwete. It was found that principals who were suitably qualified for the role after having completed the Department of Education’s Advanced Certificate in Education for School Leadership, which was seen as a professional qualification for principalship, showed higher rates of compliance and management skill. The study made the distinction between leadership and management, and found that the qualification tended to focus on management as opposed to leadership.

Discipline in schools is a strong point of contention because of a range of social and legislative issues. A critical aspect related to discipline, was the way in which the education managers conceptualised what was meant by the due processes to be followed. “There were misunderstandings about the meaning and implementation of due process which include the correct steps to follow for fair disciplinary hearings. The common misunderstandings include aspects of the learners’ right to information, who should be involved in disciplinary committees, the involvement of witnesses and learner representation,” said Dr Nicholus Mollo. There was a clear lack of understanding that the reason for the decision of a disciplinary process must be based on evidence presented during the hearing. Minutes were often not kept and in certain cases there was no knowledge as to which act/law/policy was applicable to the disciplinary outcome. However, studies were devoted to ensuring a balanced view on disciplinary issues which provided schools, teachers and principals with the legal knowledge and understanding to implement fair disciplinary processes. Dr Lodewikus Herselman elaborates that, “The Constitution, SA Schools Act, and the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act were all looked at to see how they could positively influence disciplinary decisions in SA schools. Lawfulness, reasonableness, and fairness were the legal hallmarks used to ensure that disciplinary outcomes are more effective for school improvement”.

By looking at where the basic structures of the education system are lacking, UP’s research has shown workable solutions by using existing knowledge, skills and people to provide a shift towards making better policy choices both at a school leadership level and with a possible impact on state policy. The research has shown that by tackling problems like discipline, leadership attitude and commitment, and valuing the wisdom of experienced educators that South Africa can improve on its education system for the future.

The full theses from the University of Pretoria’s Faculty of Education PhD candidates showing these research findings are available online from UPSpace at:

Hildah Lorato Mokgolodi – *Harnessing experiential knowledge and skills of retired educators to inform career development programmes in Botswana*. (<http://hdl.handle.net/2263/44142>)

Bishum Dasarathlal Parag – *Leadership practices of principals of successful primary schools*. (<http://hdl.handle.net/2263/44143>)

Ephraim Matala Kgwete – *Understanding School Leadership: A study of the ACE School Leadership Programme and leadership practices.* (<http://hdl.handle.net/2263/44145>)

Lodewikus Stephanus Herselman – *Lawful, reasonable and fair decision-making in disciplinary cases in secondary schools*. (<http://hdl.handle.net/2263/44144>)

Nicholus Tumelo Mollo – *Education Managers’ understanding and implementation of due process during learner discipline*. (<http://hdl.handle.net/2263/44146>)

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