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NEWS RELEASE

UP excels in Middle East and Africa Future Leaders tourism challenge hosted in Dubai



University of Pretoria representatives from left to right: Kutlwano Mochalatse, Prof Anneli Douglas, Dr Bianca Frost and Juanca Oosthuizen.

Dubai - University of Pretoria (UP) [Tourism Management](#) honours students Juanca Oosthuizen and Kutlwano Mochalatse recently did UP proud when they participated in the finals of the Middle East and Africa (MEA) Future Leaders Challenge (FLC) in Dubai. UP secured a place in the finals after competing against 16 South African tertiary education institutions and winning the national leg of the competition in May 2024.

The [MEA FLC](#) is designed to foster collaboration and innovation in the hospitality and tourism industry across the MEA region. By connecting students, educators, industry leaders, policymakers and government representatives, it aims to elevate educational standards, enhance talent development and drive sustainable growth within the sector.

The finals of the challenge, which took place in January, brought together 95 top-performing students from 23

higher education institutions across 13 countries in the Middle East and Africa, alongside more than 80 school directors, industry leaders, policymakers and government representatives from the United Arab Emirates. Thirteen teams, made up of university students from various countries in the MEA region, participated in the final challenge. Mochalatse's team won third place with its innovative solution, while Oosthuizen was identified as one of the top three Future Leaders in the tourism and hospitality industry.

"Participating in the Future Leaders Challenge was a game-changer," Mochalatse said. "It was a great opportunity to forge lasting connections with my fellow Future Leaders from across the Middle East and Africa region, and to become part of this dynamic community where we are all united in the pursuit of making a meaningful impact on the tourism and hospitality industry."

"This was an empowering experience that encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone," Oosthuizen added. "It highlighted the importance of teamwork in the tourism and hospitality industry, and illustrated what we can achieve when we support and learn from one another. The challenge opened my eyes to the incredible opportunities in the industry, connecting us with professionals, exploring career paths, and witnessing the future of tourism and hospitality. I am honoured to be recognised as a top Future Leader. This recognition reflects my hard work, dedication and efforts to inspire and uplift others during our challenges. The experience has increased my confidence, motivating me to collaborate and embrace new opportunities to create positive change in the industry."

As the fastest-growing hospitality and tourism region globally, the MEA market is projected to create at least 1.3 million jobs in the next five years. However, the current talent pool is estimated to meet between only 16% and 22% of these roles. Alignment of the human capital plan between governments, industry leaders and academic institutions plays a pivotal role in creating a sustainable workforce for the industry. By uniting these key stakeholders, the initiative aims to develop a comprehensive human capital strategy to ensure the region's workforce is prepared to meet the demands of this rapid growth.

"This event is about achieving alignment between the industry's evolving needs and the next generation's voice being heard," said Hubert Ummels, founder of the MEA FLC. "By fostering collaboration among leading stakeholders, we aim to pave the way for a hospitality and tourism sector that thrives on innovation, inclusivity and sustainability."

"The commitment and creativity shown by the students have been extraordinary," FLC Director Marvy Rieder added. "It's inspiring to see these young professionals rise to the challenge, and deliver ideas that resonate deeply with the industry's needs and their own."

A key highlight was the first-ever School Directors' Alliance Summit, convening over 80 school directors, industry leaders and policymakers to collaborate on a comprehensive human capital strategy for the region. Professor Anneli Douglas of UP's Tourism Management Division represented the University at the summit. Interactive panels featuring global and pan-regional C-level executives from top hospitality and tourism partners tackled critical topics such as aligning academic programmes with future industry needs and sharing visions on the human capital plan for the region.

The success of the FLC reflects the commitment of its partners, which include the Hilton, Accor, the Radisson Hotel Group, Emaar Hospitality, NHL Stenden, the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism, Vision Linens and GameChangers. Their support signifies a shared dedication to addressing skill gaps, fostering talent and ensuring that the MEA region remains at the forefront of hospitality and tourism innovation.

The Tourism Management Division in UP's Department of Marketing Management acknowledges Prof Douglas and Dr Bianca Frost for their involvement in the initiative, as well as Prof Yolanda Jordaan, Head of the Department of Marketing Management, for making it possible for the students to attend the event.

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Media enquiries can be directed to Mr Sashlin Girraj - Public Relations & Events Manager

Email: sashlin.girraj@up.ac.za | Cell: +27(0)72 447 3784

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za