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UCT professor wins award for commitment to safe and secure transport at ‘Science Oscars’

University of Cape Town (UCT) professor in Transport Planning and Engineering at the Department of Civil Engineering, Marianne Vanderschuren, recently won the Special Annual Theme Award: Basic Science and Sustainable Development at the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)-South 32 awards.

Also known as the ‘Science Oscars’, the awards recognise outstanding contributions to science, engineering and Technology (SET) and innovation in South Africa.

Vanderschuren, who holds a PhD in intelligent transport systems and an MSc in systems engineering and policy analysis, says her passion for transport started from the young age of six when she would help her father – who owned a driving school – wash his car.

Vanderschuren is now an international leader in her field who has dedicated her career to improving sustainable transport approaches in Africa with a special focus on road traffic, pollution and, more recently, the gender inequity and safety of women.

“I am still speechless and in disbelief,” she says. “Over the years I have tried to balance academic outputs and making a difference in practice. It is touching that the NSTF recognises this. I also have received the most heart-warming messages from former students indicating how proud they are, that I am paving the way for them. I try to be a role model and broadening the views, one student at a time.”

Vanderschuren – who has recently been elected as the 119th President of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE) – is only the third female president in the institute’s history. She says that her career has not only been dedicated to ensuring the improvements for vulnerable road users, which saves many lives on our roads, but is also passionate in seeing tangible equality in the field of engineering globally and in South Africa.

“I know I am one of 21 female fellows of around 200 in SAICE. For the UK Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE), the number of female fellows is less than 300 out of over 2 000. Research has shown that women bring unique and needed views to the table. This is also true for transport systems design. I want to contribute that and encourage as many people as possible to follow me and work with me to change the world,” she adds.

Recently, Vanderschuren and her colleagues have developed the curriculum and course outlines for the Transport Leadership Program for Africa. This program is unique of its kind in the world and will soon be offered by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana.

“We have spent about two-and-a half-years with a team of specialists developing the program,” she says. “It marries the graduate school leadership approach with the transport needs of the African continent. The Covid-19 pandemic did delay the rollout of the program, but I am hopeful and excited for it to start running soon.”



Prof Marianne Vanderschuren (middle) receiving the Special Annual Theme Award at the 2022 National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)-South 32 awards. Photo: NSTF

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