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UCT professor elected to National Academy of Engineering



Professor Alison Lewis

Photo: Nasief Manie

Professor Alison Lewis, dean of the [Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment \(EBE\)](#) at the University of Cape Town (UCT), has been elected to the prestigious National Academy of Engineering (NAE) – a recognition she calls a “big honour”. This election marks a significant milestone for Professor Lewis and UCT, highlighting her exceptional contributions to engineering on a global scale.

This achievement adds another accolade for Professor Lewis’ distinguished career, acknowledging her profound impact on her discipline. It also marks a pivotal significant moment for women in engineering leadership, emphasising the critical need for female representation in global positions.

Professor Lewis' election to the NAE recognises her groundbreaking work in crystallisation processes for saline water treatment and extraction metallurgy, as well as her leadership in engineering education. The NAE has over 2 000 peer-elected members and international members, as well as senior professionals in business, academia, and government who are among the world's most accomplished engineers.

Commenting about her election, Lewis said: "The academy is significant because it explicitly promotes engineers to provide leadership and expertise – not just in technical fields, but more broadly. Engineers are often reluctant to step forward and assume leadership, but I think that they have excellent skills and could contribute more to this sphere."

She will be formally inducted into the NAE during their annual meeting on 29 September 2024. "The NAE has in its mission 'provide engineering leadership to the service of the nation'; I would like to see this broadened to encompass a more global view. As an African member, my voice will be to extend the mission of the NAE beyond its borders," she said.

As a faculty leader, Lewis has observed changes within the discipline. "Engineering has changed from being very technocentric and 'apolitical' to being much more socially and environmentally conscious, as well as being more attractive to a much more diverse range of students who want to make a difference in the world.

"I have focused on transformation during my tenure, and, during that time, the profile of our staff has changed significantly. I started in 2015 at the same time as UCT, entered a few years of sequential crises. So, I suppose that one of the characteristics my faculty developed during that time was extreme resilience."

She added: "Currently, we are regaining our stability and optimism after many years of challenges and upheaval. Our forward-looking and future-fit projects include crass faculty curriculum revision. This project will update and renew our current offerings, rethinking them so that they have a more holistic approach and a greater emphasis on sustainability, social responsiveness as well as cutting edge developments in artificial intelligence and data designs."

Lewis emphasised that meaningful and effective contributions to society requires the involvement of both women and men. "To women, I would like to say: come to EBE! We have so much to offer you – a cutting-edge degree that will be intellectually challenging and enable you to contribute at the highest level. To men, come to EBE! We need all of you to make a difference."

Story by Kamva Somdyala, UCT News

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