



Graduates at one of the exhibition stands

Co-operative Education's relationship with industry goes beyond Careers Fair

It is true that there are thousands of graduates without jobs - a most frustrating situation! However, an MUT graduate who has made contact with the Department of Co-operative Education is likely to avoid this type of catastrophe. The department is hard at work connecting the graduates with prospective employers. Once a year it runs a Careers Fair, a platform where graduates and senior students get a chance to share information about job-related issues.

To date, 127 graduates have been recruited by industry since the 2018 Careers Fair that took place at the University's Seme Hall from 31 May to 1 June, 2018. The value of the fair is highlighted by the fact that companies like Sapref recruit on the spot. Some companies communicate with graduates after the fair and hire them or offer internships and other job opportunities.

The director of the department, Fundiswa Nofemela, said MUT benefits a great deal from the relationship with industry, which has been firmly established over the years. Fundiswa said the interaction with students goes beyond the Careers Fair. "Companies communicate with our graduates and students during and after the Careers Fair. Companies like Transnet, Umhlatuse Water and eThekweni Municipality have been hiring our Chemical Engineering students for a number of years. Also Eskom continues to hire our Electrical Engineering graduates." Fundiswa said that they have a solid relationship with these particular companies and many other company representatives that attend the fair.

She said the highlight of the 2018 Careers Fair was the presence of the South African Council for Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP). The SACPCMP was established to regulate Construction Management and Construction Project Management Professionals, in order to protect the public. "They enlightened our students on the requirements for registration with a particular industry. We are looking at increasing the participation of such bodies in the fair," said Fundiswa.

Also of importance was the fact that Careers Fair gave companies an opportunity to create an awareness of their line of work and essential skills. "Now our students have a much wider understanding of the industry market thanks to the information that was exchanged between the graduates and the industry representatives." Fundiswa said that the fair had become an information sharing session that taught the students the value of networking. Now they can network in a professional way. The environment was conducive to teaching, learning and socialising.

The students also learnt a great deal from the SETAs who were at the Career Fair and who fund the learnership programmes using the 1% contribution from industry. At the gala dinner on the first evening, the guest speaker, Andile Sipengane (COO of the Services SETA), made an appeal to industry. It was a request to become more involved in shaping the academic programmes of higher education institutions so they are more relevant. This idea was supported by MUT's Vice-Chancellor, Dr Duma Enoch Malaza, because it would contribute to the employability of the graduates.

After thanking her team, Fundiswa mentioned that the reason companies continued to be part of the Careers Fair was the strong relationship between MUT and industry. Over the years their rapport has improved tremendously. Out of the 40 companies that attended, most are familiar faces that have been putting up their stands at the University's Seme Hall year after year. Some of the leaders in industry are members of MUT's Advisory Boards, which is an indication of the depth of their interest in the educational system of the University and the country. Industry representatives also make a contribution to WIL imbizos. According to Fundiswa, the fair is becoming so popular that some companies had to be turned away. She joked that they might have to hire a huge tent next year!

The department also prepares the senior students for the world of work. Lindiwe Myende, a staff member in the department, runs the Employability Improvement Project (EIP). The programme was launched in August 2011 as a bilateral technical cooperation project between the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to promote employability skills amongst South African university students. The programme is in alignment with the National Development Plan 2030 and the National Skills Development Strategy III. It provides the students with all the necessary information that will enable them to fit into the work environment. These 'employability skills' are also known as soft skills, generic skills, core skills or cognitive skills. Third-year Environmental Health students, Jonathan Rorke and Nokubonga Mbatha, said they had learnt a great deal from what Lindiwe taught them.



The organising team