

South African team wins international business plan competition

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The award is open to students across the global Laureate network and attracted more than 150 business plans from 34 network institutions across the globe.

Dugtig who is head of community engagement at MSA, mentors approximately 50 students per annum, reaching approximately 500 students each year. Her winning business idea, My Voice, aims to give South African learners the skills required to engage, speak and lead within a democratic society. Its extensively researched curriculum focuses on human rights, democratic institutions and their functions, policy development, and voter rights and responsibilities. Its content is defined and guided by the South African Constitution.

Dugtig says, "Globally, there is a trend towards people participating less in the democratic process. They become

disillusioned when they do not get the outcomes they want nor make progress because they do not know the channels to go through. We aim to teach people how to participate actively in a democracy, taking collective charge of all our futures.”

The business’ goals will be fast-tracked, thanks to winning the McGuire Business Plan Competition. Dugtig notes how this support will drive the success of her team’s fledgling business. “Winning the award has given us so much more confidence in our product and legitimised our ideas. The entire pitch process is invaluable, as it allowed us to form a strong business plan and recalibrate our approach. Being supported by Monash South Africa and Laureate gives our team the credibility required, as we share our concept with schools across the country.”

Startup able to expand to more schools

The prize money and one year mentorship that is part of the prize presents opportunities that are not usually available to a startup. For example, My Voice can build a professional brand and world-class curriculum. As an apartisan organisation, My Voice will also need to conduct pilots in selected schools. It will follow a hybrid model, offering its services to both underprivileged and wealthy schools. This decision follows the insight that South African learners of all backgrounds require a greater understanding of the importance and role of participating in a democratic society. Ultimately, the team aims to produce a blended curriculum of both online and in-person tuition that can be replicated and scaled.

“The research phase yielded great response. Teachers identified a widespread need for critical thinking, while learners asked for leadership development and voter education. This presents a powerful opportunity for the team to gather data and study the political discourse taking place among the youth of South Africa. This will result in knowledge that all South Africans and policy makers will benefit from.

“Through my work and research for this business plan, I have come to the conclusion that young people are hungry for change and engagement. Sometimes young people are not taken as seriously as they should be, but we need to help prepare them to engage in civil society and step up into the economy. Through finding their voices, young people can create a future they want to see,” concludes Dugtig.

President and academic president of MSA, Prof Alwyn Louw added, “Our goal is to be aligned with the national agenda and nurture talent that can lead South Africa and other neighbouring countries to new levels of growth. Over the years, the institution has produced nine Mandela Rhodes Scholars, while another MSA student Lebo Sekhotla won the Laureate Here for Good Award two years ago. The entire education journey is intended to be life-changing, for our students and their families, employers and local communities.”

Monash South Africa (MSA) joined the Laureate International Universities network in 2013. For more information, go to www.msa.ac.za.

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