

MASTER OF HER OWN DESTINY

Qondisa Ngxanga is the first LEAP graduate to get a Master's degree. In 2013, she completed a Master's in Financial Mathematics at the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS).

I was born in the Eastern Cape and moved to Cape Town after my grandmother, who was raising me, passed away. I joined LEAP in Grade 10 and matriculated in 2005. I enjoyed maths and was good at it, but at first I thought of studying either fashion or physiotherapy at university.

When I got accepted for a BSc in Maths and Statistics at the University of the Western Cape, I never dreamt that I would end up loving maths even more. But I did; so much so that I decided to do my Honours in Computational Finance. Then I got an opportunity to study towards my Master's at AIMS, and I knew I wanted to study still further. AIMS only takes a small number of students from all over Africa so I felt special to have been selected to do Financial Mathematics there.

"I never expected that I would one day be this educated. When I look at where I come from, it is unbelievable because I am the first person in my family to have obtained a matric certificate."

I think I am also the only person in my area of Langa to have a Master's degree. It has taken a lot of hard work to get here. I am fortunate that numbers just make sense

to me but I also have to focus on my studies. It's not easy.

When I started tertiary I realized I had to change my attitude and not always be interested in getting As. I decided what was important was to continue the academic journey even if I wasn't always top of the class.

I am now doing a Research Master's and tutoring at the University of the Western Cape. Over the next couple of years, I hope to get a job and either obtain a doctorate or MBA. Whatever career I follow, I'm sure it'll involve maths. Maths is the mother of all faculties and disciplines. For me, life is about numbers.

QONDISA'S TIPS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Don't stay at home. Focus on the next steps you can take. Even if you need to change your tertiary plans, keep moving towards something.

Give up on the dream of perfection. You will want to excel to show your worth, but this may not work out. I failed some modules on the way to getting my Master's but I understood that I didn't need to be perfect.

You can't count on luck, passion or skills. Most of us need to be diligent and consistent to succeed. Cover your bases and work hard.

