



Concept Document

Women In Leadership

The National Association of Student Development Professionals

**Theme: "Empowering Leadership, Inspiring
Change: Cultivating Future Pathways for
Women in Higher Education"**

27-30 AUG 2025



UFS

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

BLOEMFONTEIN

Registration Dates

10 June - 20 July 2025

Presenter Submission

17 June - 01 August 2025

FOR MORE INFO:

admin@nasdev.org

www.nasdev.org



1. Introduction

In South Africa, the observance of Women's Month in August serves to commemorate the profound contributions of women throughout the nation's history, as well as the persistent pursuit of gender equality and justice. This commemoration is profoundly intertwined with the historical narrative of women's activism in opposition to the repressive apartheid regime. The essence of effective leadership is rooted in empowerment. It equips women with the necessary tools, resources, and assurance to take on leadership roles and effectuate significant contributions to their communities and organizations. By cultivating a setting that supports women's aspirations, we empower them to transcend obstacles and confront challenges. The recognition of one's intrinsic value and potential is essential for women, fostering a sense of autonomy that has the power to shape the trajectories of future generations.

The National Association of Student Development Professionals (NASDEV), in partnership with the University of the Free State, is set to present the 2025 Women in Leadership Program from the 27th to 30th August. Aligned with Women's Month in South Africa and the international theme "Accelerate Action" (global campaign theme) & UN theme "For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment", the NASDEV Women in Leadership theme for 2025 is **"Empowering Leadership, Inspiring Change: Cultivating Future Pathways for Women in Higher Education"**. This event seeks to establish a vibrant forum for discourse, thoughtful examination, skill enhancement, and cooperative interaction among women professionals in the realms of student affairs and higher education. This initiative acknowledges the persistent necessity to enhance women's capabilities in effective leadership, equipping them with the essential tools, resources, and self-assurance required to take on leadership roles and significantly impact their communities and organizations. We aspire to cultivate an environment that fosters women's aspirations and disseminates skills to empower them in overcoming obstacles and challenges.



2. Objectives

- To critically engage with the structural and societal barriers facing women in student affairs and leadership.
- To foster cross-institutional mentorship, peer learning, and support networks among women professionals.
- To advance inclusive leadership practices that integrate gender equity, policy, and innovation.
- To co-create actionable strategies with students and professionals for building transformative, gender-sensitive environments in higher education.

3. Themes and Sub-Themes

3.1 Themes 2025


Theme background

Annually, a unique theme is selected. The theme for International Women's Month 2025 is **"For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment."** This theme is particularly significant in 2025 as it marks the **30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**, a landmark blueprint for advancing women's rights globally. The theme calls for urgent action to unlock equal rights, power, and opportunities for all, with a focus on empowering the next generation of young women and adolescent girls as catalysts for lasting change.

The theme for the NASDEV Women in Leadership Conference 2025 **"Empowering Leadership, Inspiring Change: Cultivating Future Pathways for Women in Higher Education"** underscores the essential role of women in leadership and their significant influence on society and a call for urgent action.

3.2 Sub-Themes

1. **Breaking Barriers and Forging Paths:**

- The journey of women who have shattered glass ceilings in various fields.
 - Overcoming Obstacles: Discussing strategies to conquer industry-specific challenges and societal barriers.
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- Advancing Health Equity: Addressing social and cultural obstacles to reproductive health access through community action and policy reforms

2. Developing Transformative Leadership:

- Importance of mentorship and peer support.
- Cultivating leadership skills in young women.
- Establishing impactful mentorship programs.
- Building a personal brand

3. Work-Life Integration:

- Address the challenges women face in achieving work-life balance.
- Discuss strategies for setting boundaries and prioritizing well-being while pursuing leadership roles.

4. Shaping the Future: Fuelling Innovation, Influence and Growth:

- Explore how women can leverage technology and digital tools to enhance their leadership skills.
- Investigate the vital roles women play in policymaking and advocacy.
- Emphasising how women leaders can influence legislation that impacts future generations.
- Navigating the Entrepreneurial Landscape.

5. Holistic Well-being for Women in Leadership: Navigating Mental Health & Societal Challenges

- The role of social media in both perpetuating and addressing gender-based violence among students.
- Best practices for creating a safe and supportive reporting environment for victims.
- Understanding the Mental Health Landscape for Women in Leadership
- The Intersecting Impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on Professional Lives


3.3 Topics

- 1. Transforming Systems: Women Overcoming Leadership Barriers in Higher Education:** This topic examines the obstacles and strategies women utilize to surmount systemic barriers, stereotypes, and institutional biases within




the student affairs profession. It will emphasize leadership trajectories, organizational cultures, and policy advocacy essential for challenging exclusionary practices.

2. **Mentorship as Transformation: Fostering Future Women Leaders Through Guidance and Collaboration:** Emphasizes the importance of deliberate mentorship and sponsorship in career advancement, especially for aspiring women leaders. This theme underscores the significance of intergenerational knowledge exchange, mentorship, and organized developmental trajectories within student affairs.
3. **Resilience and Adaptability in the Sector: Flourishing Amid Institutional and Societal Transformation.** This session will examine the evolving landscape of higher education and how women leaders maintain adaptability and foresight amid disruptions, including political, economic, and technological changes impacting universities.
4. **Embodied Leadership: Confronting Norms and Celebrating Women's Identities in Leadership.** This theme broadens the discourse on leadership by integrating aesthetics, self-presentation, confidence, and identity. It contests the stereotype that intellect and appearance are incompatible, advocating for authenticity and the validity of varied expressions of womanhood in leadership.
5. **Redefining Success: Work-Life Integration and Well-being for Women:** Analyzing how female leaders navigate personal, academic, and professional obligations while managing expectations related to caregiving, emotional labour, and productivity within the higher education landscape.
6. **Future-Forward: Embracing Technology and Innovation in Leadership:** Examining how women can utilize technology and digital resources to augment their leadership capabilities and foster innovation within their organizations.
7. **Women in Policy: Shaping the Future through Advocacy and Legislation:** Examining the crucial roles women occupy in strategic policymaking and advocacy, highlighting the capacity of women leaders to affect legislation that influences future generations.
8. **Establishing Networks: Forming Supportive Communities for Women Leaders:** Emphasizing the significance of networking in leadership advancement, providing strategies for cultivating robust, supportive communities that empower women across various sectors.

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9. **Empowering Women Entrepreneurs:** Emphasizing the creative leadership of women in their entrepreneurial pursuits and promoting networking among women entrepreneurs to enhance collaboration.
 10. **Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education:** Analyzing legislation, institutional policies, and optimal strategies for addressing gender-based violence.
 11. **Student-as-Partner: Co-creating Inclusive Student Leadership Programmes:** This session explores the transformative potential of the student-as-partner approach in developing inclusive leadership programs. By engaging students as co-creators rather than passive recipients, institutions can foster more equitable, relevant, and empowering leadership development experiences especially for women and other historically underrepresented student voices. Drawing on lived experience, the session shares insights from participatory curriculum design initiatives that centre collaboration, mutual respect, and shared authority as foundations for inclusive student leadership.

The selected topics align with the profiles of the organizations aiming to invite speakers, intending to convene the goal of convening South Africa's female trailblazers for a conference focused on empowering women. This platform will enable the sharing of insights and expertise on the identified themes and topics. Addressing these topics will enable participants to inspire others and lead effectively, thereby facilitating the emergence of future generations of female leaders. Women, despite being acknowledged, continue to be markedly underrepresented in decision-making positions across politics, business, and communities.

4. Expected Outcomes

- Strengthened leadership skills and awareness among women in student affairs. Strengthened mentorship networks within institutions.
 - Outlined approaches and cooperative frameworks for inclusive programming.
 - Suggestions for organizational change, policy enhancement, and leadership growth.
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5. Format and Methodology

The program will include keynote addresses, masterclasses, interactive workshops, and panel discussions. An emphasis will be placed on a participatory and inclusive approach, fostering reflection, collaboration, and the exchange of knowledge.

6. Conclusion

The 2025 NASDEV Women in Leadership Program offers an essential opportunity to rethink leadership with a focus on feminist principles, inclusivity, and transformative approaches. It encourages women in student affairs to embrace their strength, guide with purpose, and collaboratively forge a future where each woman's perspective influences the institutional story. As a key initiative of the organization, we encourage you to permit your delegates from your respective institutions to join us in empowering women within the Student Affairs Sector and beyond, helping them to realize their fullest potential.

Guests by Invitation

The NASDEV Women in Leadership conference is organised for Higher Education and TVET sector categories listed below:

- Student Development Practitioners,
- Governance Practitioners,
- Living and Learning Practitioners,
- Youth Development Practitioners, Transformation and Social Cohesion Practitioners,
- Sports and Recreation Practitioners,
- Policy Makers,
- Student Representative Councils in the Higher Education and the TVET sector.
- Gender equity practitioners and researchers



Important Date

Final Registration: 05 June to 15 July 2025

Conference Fees

Category	Amount
Delegate from affiliated Institutions (University & TVET)	R7 000.00
Delegate from unaffiliated Institutions (University & TVET)	R8 000.00
Student delegate	R7 000.00

Payment for Conference Registration Fees

Registration fees are payable through the following bank details:

Name: National Association of Student Development

Reference: Name of the Institution

Account Holder: NASDEV

Bank: First National Bank

Account: 62708577020

Branch: Bellville Civic Centre

Branch Code: 254005

Type: Gold Business Account