

2013

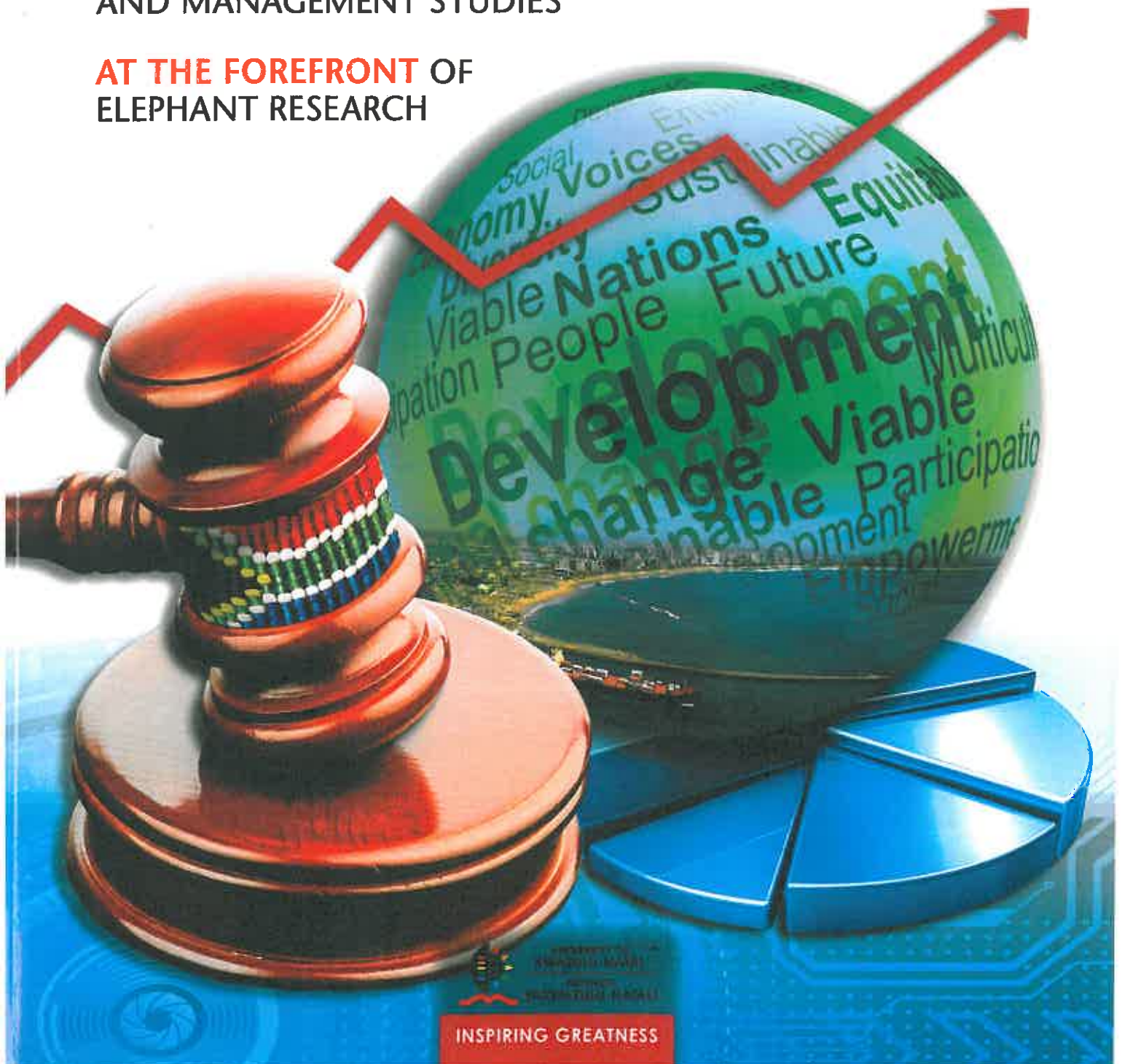
# UKZN TOUCH

A UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL ALUMNI MAGAZINE

**AFRICAN LANGUAGES** – A RESOURCE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION AND NATION BUILDING

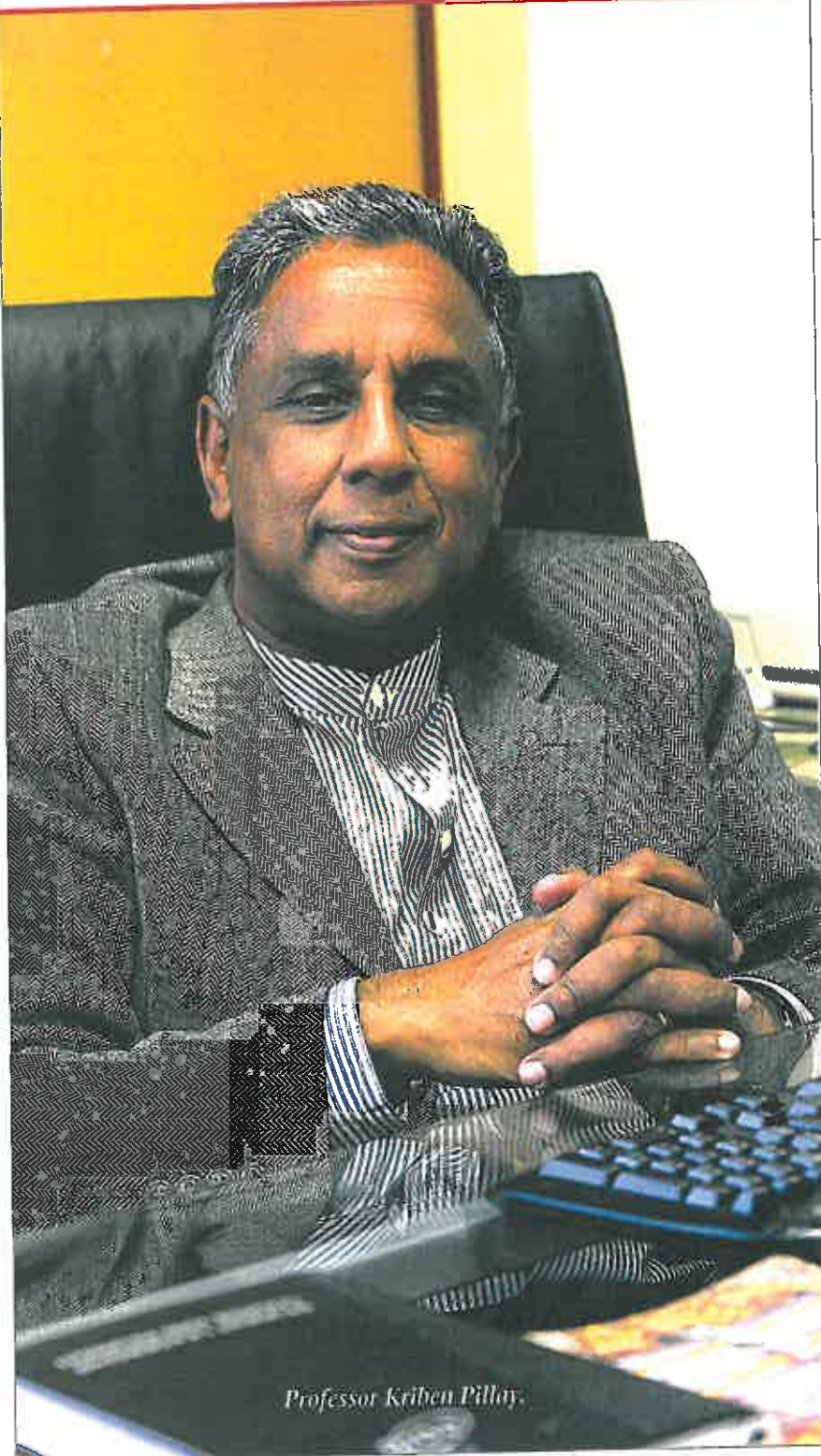
**A FOCUS ON** THE COLLEGE OF LAW AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES

**AT THE FOREFRONT OF** ELEPHANT RESEARCH



INSPIRING GREATNESS

# USING ILLUSION AS A PEDAGOGIC DEVICE



*Professor Kriben Pillay.*

**Abracadabra! Professor Kriben Pillay has a magic touch when it comes to getting a message across.**

**BY: GREG DARDAGAN**

**A**nd he uses this 'gift' to the benefit of students as well as academics in his position as UKZN's Dean of Teaching and Learning in the College of Law and Management Studies.

Pillay describes himself as a performing mentalist who has adapted the art of illusion to assist in teaching difficult concepts in academic courses.

'I use illusion as a pedagogic device and have experienced an amazing response to it from students. Within half an hour I can show youngsters how to think more critically about certain things,' said Pillay.

'For instance I do an illusion in which participants are convinced to believe in one thing when in fact it is something else. One can then engage participants how to critically impact what they have just experienced and I think this, more than anything else, has great value to society because we are constantly being duped by politicians, the media, and a whole range of other elements.'

Pillay, a member of the British Society of Mystery Entertainers, is now writing a book reflecting on how mentalism has informed his teach-

ing. 'I have managed to merge or link my arts background, especially the mentalism performance aspects, into leadership studies and teaching which is what I believe resulted in my Distinguished Teachers Award in 2008.'

One of the biggest problems in teaching leadership, says Pillay, is that people present the most fantastic courses about how to do things better but then within months participants are back to square one. 'My research has been trying to understand what has been happening and where we can make a difference.'

'My work shows that individuals can bring about change when they start affecting the organisational climate even though it may be miniscule to begin with.'

Pillay has been Dean of Teaching and Learning in the College for the past 18 months. Virtually anything that relates to the quality of teaching and learning is his responsibility within the College's four Schools of Law, the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, Management Information Technology and Governance, and Accounting, Economics and Finance.

He is responsible for overseeing curriculum redesign and leading the process through the various College and University structures, ensuring what is offered is economically viable for the College, playing a leadership role in the professional development of all the academic staff and making sure academics take advantage of various programmes on offer to improve their skills.

'I have just completed a course in neuroleadership - a growing area in which neuro sciences are impacting on a range of disciplines. It's about understanding how the brain operates in certain situations and what kind of chemicals are being released thus causing people to act in a cer-

---

The mindset is still: 'I want to make it for myself' whereas it should be: 'I want to make it for myself and others'.

tain way.

'My own personal research has directly impacted on what I would like to see happening in my College and the entire University. It's about how we design our lectures, how we speak to our students, how we go about doing assessments,' said Pillay.

'It is not about molycoddling the student - it is simply saying the student becomes more results reflected. So if for instance they were given an introductory module on how their brain works with regard to certain types of stress relationships they might also learn how to manage themselves better.'

The Teaching and Learning Unit also plays an important role in providing support including individual academic monitoring for under-prepared students who are identified as such early on while they are struggling with their studies.

'We also oversee with two of the Schools the extended curriculum programme where a student would for example do the BCom course over four years instead of three because of gaps in their education which were identified through their matric entry points. This gives them a better platform and less chance of failure.'

Pillay said a lot of his research revolved around what he termed 'mindfulness'. 'When you are mindful something physical happens to the brain. It's about being alert and using the brain in a much more critical and alert way. When you pay attention that attention changes the brain - in neurosciences it is called

neuro plasticity.'

There was so much in society today which made people mindless, including things like i-pads and 'music-filled car plugs'. 'This cuts people off from the world because they are fearful of it but if we can dissolve fear the so-called fearful things may still happen but we are not running away from them - instead we are engaging with life and trying to make things better.'

Pillay said UKZN needed to play a leading role in educating students that a degree was not just a piece of paper which became a passport to a lot of money. 'We are here to produce well rounded citizens with a strong social sense who contribute critically to overall developments in South Africa and the whole region.'

'The danger is that we are in a social cultural paradigm that is "me" centred and there is very little thinking about "us". This is contributing to very fragile social structures worldwide with companies and banks collapsing because CEOs have taken them for a ride.'

'And so while we may produce skilled graduates the mindset is still: "I want to make it for myself" whereas it should be: "I want to make it for myself and others".'

'I believe that as a University it is time we stood up and allowed ourselves to be counted in this area of ethical regeneration.' **N**

*Professor Kriben Pillay is Dean of Teaching and Learning in the College of Law and Management Studies.*