



Wi-NITheCS Women's Month Mini-school

Celebrating Underrepresented Women in Theoretical and Computational Sciences



Attend 4 online lectures:

Wednesday 5, 12, 19 & 26 August 2026



14h00-15h00 SAST

This Mini-school highlights the remarkable contributions of women who have shaped the theoretical and computational sciences. Across four lectures, attendees will learn about the lives, discoveries, and lasting legacies of pioneering women scientists whose groundbreaking work continues to inspire modern research: **Lise Meitner**, **Ada Lovelace**, **Maryam Mirzakhani** and **Jocelyn Bell Burnell**. These lectures will be presented by women working and studying in these fields today, celebrating both the achievements of the past and the next generation of women advancing science.

LECTURE 1

5 August

'Lise Meitner'

Jo-Marie Rossouw (University of the Western Cape - UWC)

Lost in the archives: How gender, race, and politics left one of the most important nuclear physicists without a Nobel Prize, despite 49 nominations. Learn about Lise Meitner, who helped explain one of the most significant discoveries in modern physics: the splitting of the atom.



Jo-Marie is a Master's student at UWC, specialising in computational and experimental nanophysics. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Astrophysics and an Honours degree in Solid State Physics from the University of the Free State. Raised in an all-female household, she carries women's empowerment close to her heart, and it continues to shape both who she is and the work she does.

LECTURE 3

19 August

'Ada Lovelace'

Saarisha Govender (University of KwaZulu-Natal - UKZN)

Ada Lovelace, widely regarded as the world's first programmer, envisioned the modern computer long before its invention. However, despite publishing the first computer algorithm, her groundbreaking contributions were largely overlooked until long after her death.



Saarisha is a Master's student at UKZN under the supervision of Prof Ilya Sinayskiy. Her research focuses on quantum kernel methods and robustness measures for quantum machine learning models in the Noisy Intermediate-Scale Quantum (NISQ) era. She holds a BSc (M Stream) degree, with a double major in Astronomy and Physics, and a BSc Honours degree in Physics, both conferred by UKZN.

LECTURE 2

12 August

'Maryam Mirzakhani'

Kerry Porrill (Stellenbosch University & University of Oxford)

Maryam Mirzakhani was the first woman to win a Fields Medal. She made major contributions in fields such as hyperbolic surfaces & moduli spaces. Many awards have been established in her memory to promote women and girls in mathematics.



Kerry completed her BSc and BSc Hons in Mathematics at Stellenbosch University. She is a Rhodes Scholar Elect and will begin her Master's in Mathematics at the University of Oxford in September 2026. Kerry is involved in training students for the national mathematics teams. She has also run several Olympiad camps for girls.

LECTURE 4

26 August

'Jocelyn Bell Burnell'

Coral Pillay (University of the Witwatersrand - Wits)

As a PhD student, Jocelyn Bell noticed a tiny unexplained signal, leading to one of the most remarkable discoveries in modern astronomy: pulsars. Although the discovery earned the 1974 Nobel Prize in Physics, she was not among its recipients.



Coral recently completed a Masters in Physics at Wits, where she used cosmological simulations to study supermassive black hole pairs, and their detectability with next-generation radio telescopes. As a Rhodes Scholar, she will begin a DPhil in Astrophysics at the University of Oxford later this year.

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