Research at UCT

We are committed both to protecting and encouraging curiosity-driven research that has a real impact on our communities and environment.

15% of SA’s NRF-rated scholars
The National Research Foundation (NRF) allocates ratings based on a researcher’s recent research outputs and impact, as perceived by international peer reviewers. In 2018, UCT again recorded the highest number of NRF-rated researchers in South Africa: 541 of UCT’s academic staff are rated by the NRF, against 514 in 2016 and 276 in 2008.

33% of SA’s A-rated scholars
A third (42) of the country’s NRF A-rated researchers, who are international leaders in their fields of research, are at UCT.

19% of SA’s SARChI chairs
A total of 33 (19%) of the country’s SARChI chairs (South African Research Chairs Initiative) are held by researchers at UCT.

125 active inventions, with 72 patent applications filed in 2017

R16 billion
in external research income generated in 2017

R39.6 million
in accumulated income since 2001 from intellectual property

R3.106 billion
in accumulated income since 2001 from intellectual property

Research and innovation in numbers

1 106 455 postgraduates registered at UCT in 2017, including 2 002 from 34 African countries.

2 363 research contracts signed in 2017

>100 of equity in spin-off companies in 2017

>1 250 million
of equity in spin-off companies in 2017

15.7%
income

43.5%
income

43%
expenses

INCOME 2017
R3 106 million

EXPENDITURE 2017
R3 060 million

State subsidy
Tuition fees
Other

Other costs

Library acquisitions, books & journals

Staff and related
Financial aid and scholarships
Jammie Shuttle
Computers, furniture and equipment

R1.2 million
print volumes and an estimated 54 km of shelf space are available at UCT Libraries.

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Massive open online courses (MOOCs)
15 MOOCs are currently running at UCT, and have attracted more than 230 000 people from over 100 different countries across the globe.

8 062 undergraduates – nearly 50% - received financial support in 2018.

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3.8%
income

41.3%income

43%
expenses

43%
expenses

28 600 students and 4 544 staff
In 2018 UCT was home to 28 600 students (17 552 undergraduates, 11 048 postgraduates) and 4 544 staff (1 208 academic and 3 336 professional, administrative support and service staff). Over the course of the year, anywhere between 100 and 1 000 students are employed by the university.

Library acquisitions, books & journals

Maintenance

Other costs

>1250
people

>1250
people
1829-1873 An unsteady start
Starting in 1829 as a private secondary school for boys, UCT’s predecessor, the South African College (SAC), wased and waned for over 40 years until 1872. The establishment of the sub-continent’s first university, the University of the Cape of Good Hope, in that year gave SAC the incentive to prepare its senior boys for post-matriculation study and eventually for a degree for the first time. This put it on stable footing and propelled it as more junior classes to the newly created SA College School (SACS).

1873-1918 Higher aspirations
Fuelled by the transformation of southern Africa through the discovery of diamonds and gold in the interior, the SAC grew steadily. In 1887 it admitted women for the first time. By 1901 it had transferred the remainder of its school pupils to SACS, in effect becoming a university college under the University of the Cape of Good Hope. After the South African War (1899-1902), it set its sights on independent university status, free of the constraints of the University of the Cape of Good Hope.

1918-1950 A teaching university on the Grootte Schuur Estate
Elevated into a fully-fledged university with its own charter in 1918, the University of the Cape of Town (UCT) made teaching its first priority. To meet the needs of emerging professions in the country, it created five new faculties. In 1928-9 it also moved the bulk of its campus to two sites on Cecil Rhodes’ Groote Schuur Estate. As a result of these burgeoning facilities, its student body swelled by 65% in this period to 245 students, though this number fell slightly in the early 1930s when the ex-service contingent which had flooded into UCT after World War II graduated.

1950-1968 Passive protest amid active research and teaching
During these years UCT began to give active support to teaching and research in the fields of medicine, engineering and science. At the same time a gradual imposition of apartheid took place on student admissions, barring black students from enrolling at UCT except with government permission. The formal public opposition which this policy elicited from many students and staff had little effect. By 1965 the number of black students at UCT had fallen to 45, from 552 ten years earlier. When UCT, under pressure from the government, agreed to revoke the appointment of a black lecturer in 1968, student outrage boiled over, producing a nine-day sit-in at UCT’s administrative headquarters, Bremner building.

1969-1985 Active protest amid hyperactive research and teaching
Parallel to the rising tide of resistance to apartheid across the country, a growing number of UCT students raised the level of their opposition to the policy barring black students from enrolling at UCT except with government permission, clashing more and more directly with police authorities. By 1978, UCT’s black student body consisted of 3,512 students, 22,669 South African students, 3,512 SADC students, 1,539 students from the rest of Africa and 860 students from elsewhere in the world.

1985–2019 An unfinished revolution
The waning of apartheid removed racial restrictions on student admissions and staff appointments even before democratic elections in 1994. This opened the way for an escalating transformation of the student body and, belatedly, of the staff profile. UCT’s 2016–2020 Strategic Planning Framework has been developed against the backdrop of widespread social action on campuses throughout the country, which have focused on inequalities, prejudices and structural disadvantages that continue to characterise South African society. The Strategic Planning Framework is organised around five broad goals and high-level institution-wide objectives to effect improvements in the areas of research, teaching and learning, internationalisation and social responsiveness, while infusing all of these with the transformation agenda.