**19 November 2018**

# UCT aims to make IT appealing to female students

Information Technology (IT) is traditionally a male-dominated sector, but the University of Cape Town's (UCT) School of IT is working hard to make the sector more attractive to women. The stereotype that majoring in the field of IT involves little except coding all day has been one of the reasons cited that women find IT an unattractive choice. But this is not a local issue and certainly not an issue at UCT only.

The UCT School of IT was founded in 2018 in response to the growing needs of the South African and global tech industry, and the increasing demand for university qualifications in the sector.

Professor Ulrike Rivett, Director of the School of IT, was the first female full professor in the Department of Information Systems.

"Women in our departments have always shown their excellence, creativity and entrepreneurship and their many accolades are witnesses to that," says Professor Rivett. Her concern remains that the shortage of IT skills in the country requires more students to join the IT sector, a field that pays better than most.

The School of IT has introduced The Girl's Lounge, sponsored by SAP and the Female Quotient. These host events to help female students network and find a comfortable space in the world of information technology.

At the recent School of IT showcase, exciting projects by both male and female students were presented, including Chelsea-Joy Wardle's work, in partnership with Milk Matters, that created a mobile app to help women donate their breast milk to premature, ill and vulnerable babies.

The School recently announced that Dr Salah Kabanda from the Department of Information Systems and Dr Maria Keet from the Department of Computer Science have both been promoted to associate professor rank.

Dr Kabanda is primarily interested in how Information and Communication Technologies, such as computer systems or mobile phones, can be used to address social and economic

problems. Her focus has been on making upcoming young researchers in Africa aware that academia is a good career opportunity, particularly in the field of information systems.

"Bridging the gap between society and technology is a challenge. We understand the technology side, but how do we use this to really solve people's problems?" asks Kabanda.

Her research interests include how technology can be used to prevent the social exclusion of people with disabilities and whether technology is a help or hindrance. The accessibility of government websites and online governmental systems for citizens is one of her key concerns.

Dr Keet's focus is knowledge engineering – how to structure large amounts of knowledge, rules and logic into ontologies so that it can be used in artificial intelligence-driven applications for the benefit of society.

Generating content for natural language is one of her interests within the field of knowledge engineering. This has many real-world uses, from automatically creating patient discharge notes in a hospital to generating weather forecasts into more of South Africa's official languages.

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