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UCT partners with community filmmakers to effect social change

Sunshine Cinema and the Centre for Film and Media Studies (CFMS) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) have partnered to create the *Film Impact Screening Facilitator Short Course*. This online short course explores the theory and practice of engaging with audiences on social change issues using documentary and fiction film screenings, discussions and other interventions. Pitched at working impact producers, communicators, creatives and purpose-driven Gen Z's still new to the job market, the course provides a toolkit for sparking change.



Emerging from the wreckage of COVID-19 lockdowns and a world in financial crisis, is a stronger than ever sense that much needs to change. A flick through the list of top shows on Netflix reveals that issue-driven documentaries have become increasingly popular. The conversations around them are changing the narrative.

In the face of short attention spans and a crush of 'big problems' vying for urgency, organisations and movements with a message have begun working with film and storytelling as a way to create impact. But what happens after the film is made, how does a film reach the right audience and convert interest into action?

Sunshine Cinema has been a leader in alternative distribution for over a decade. Their formula for landing stories with communities near and far has been tried, tested and

continuously refined. Seeing the gap that many producers, organisations and creatives experience between finished product and making an impact with audiences, partnering with the CFMS on a course was a natural fit.

According to Sunshine Cinema co-founder and course lecturer Sydelle Willow Smith, "African impact producers manage multiple challenges both in terms of storytelling across languages and cultures but also in reaching audiences who don't have access. The course content applies globally but it's our African resilience and creativity that has informed so much of our strategy and allowed us to distil what works."

Dr Liani van Maasdorp, CFMS course convener explains that although they are not teaching filmmaking in the course, production and distribution go hand in hand. "The key is collaboration. Few filmmakers have the energy or resources left after producing a film to take it around the country themselves so it can reach critical audiences. Many people affected by the human rights, social justice and environmental issues exposed in impact films live in rural and poorer communities. It takes a special group of people – from funders to activists, from Non-Governmental Organisations to academia and from filmmakers to screening facilitators – to pull together to make sure the right film reaches the right audience in the right way to make real and meaningful social change happen.

The conversation is heated around the proliferation of fake news and conspiracy bots. The antidote could be a well-made, thoroughly fact-checked documentary film accompanied by a productive conversation between stakeholders. In the right hands, this could be powerful enough to change the world.

The *Film Impact Screening Facilitator Short Course* runs from June to December 2022 and applications close 18 March.

[Learn more about the course on the website.](#)

Enquiries

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Atlantic Fellow for Health Equity in South Africa, Sibongile Mtungwa, used Sunshine Cinema's solar-powered cinema units to bring climate change documentaries to communities.

Photo: Sunshine Cinema

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