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2 June 2025

UCT lecture explores the rich interplay between physical, social and intellectual boundaries

**3 June 2025 | 17:15 SAST | Chemical Engineering Seminar Room,
Upper Campus**



Professor Jennifer Whittal

Photo: Supplied

The University of Cape Town's Professor Jennifer Whittal from the [Department of Civil Engineering](#) will explore how geospatial technologies illuminate the history of local boundaries and their enduring role in spatial injustice during her lecture, titled "Beyond

Boundaries". The lecture will take place on Tuesday, 3 June 2025 at 17:15 SAST in the Chemical Engineering Seminar Room on upper campus.

Most people are fascinated by maps. Whether digital or analogue, maps are abstractions of reality, projected, selective and simplified by the intent of the mapmaker and their client.

Far from being neutral representations, maps are cartographic metaphors that reflect their time's values, assumptions and priorities.

"We all live with boundaries – those that divide land and secure our rights, and those we encounter professionally that test our adaptability and resilience. What prompted me to choose this topic is the rich interplay between these physical, social and intellectual boundaries," said Professor Whittal.

"In this lecture, I'm excited to share insights into historic and contemporary land boundary-making, my journey to cross disciplinary lines in research, efforts to unite our profession across political and language divides in Africa, and how we may advance both theory and practice in cadastral and land tenure systems," she said.

Professor Whittal said we also map the world conceptually, creating mental models to make sense of complex systems such as law, technology and land administration. These models draw boundaries – intellectual and practical – that help us navigate complexity but can also obscure the richness and plurality of real-world systems.

In understanding and reforming such systems, local is lekker – geographical and social context matters.

Professor Whittal reflects on the early Dutch land grants at the Cape, which created both literal and social boundaries that still shape the landscape today. Drawing on her experiences in navigating the boundaries of practice and research, professional capacity building across Africa, and current explorations in pluralism, she invites us to reconsider how boundaries – both literal and metaphorical - are formed, challenged and reimagined.

Professor Whittal joined UCT as an undergraduate and then Master's student in surveying. After working for the City of Cape Town for some years, she rejoined UCT as a senior lecturer, obtaining a doctorate from the University of Calgary in the field of cadastral systems reform.

She lectures advanced surveying and land law. Professor Whittal is a professional land surveyor and active in national and international surveying and geomatics organisations. Her research interests are pro-poor, resilient and sustainable land tenure and cadastral systems, historical landholding and cadastral issues in the coastal zone. She has co-authored a book with Professor Roger Fisher on cadastral principles and practice, providing useful insights to professional practitioners, property owners and others.

- [RSVP](#) to attend the lecture in person.
- [Register](#) to attend the lecture virtually.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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