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Scientists step up research as biodiversity losses escalate

News coming out of the international Diversitas conference on biodiversity was mostly bad. But scientists are also knuckling down to fill the information gaps

The world will miss its agreed targets to stem biodiversity loss by 2010, and the oceans' ecosystems are most vulnerable.

This was the bleak scenario sketched in an opening press release from the Second Diversitas Open Science Conference, which brought together 600 scientists from around the world in Cape Town from 13 to 16 October.

The 2010 goal was set at the 6th Conference of Parties to the United Nations (UN) Convention on Biological Diversity, back in April 2003, when some 123 world ministers committed to achieving a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

Alas – it was not to be.

“We are losing species 100 times faster than new ones are being generated,” reported Dr Bob Scholes, ecologist at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and one of the local organisers of the Cape Town event.

Nowhere is this loss more telling than in the world's oceans. At the launch of UNEP's latest report, the readable and fact-packed *Blue Carbon: The Role of Health Oceans in Binding Carbon*, co-author Emily Corcoran explained that the ocean's role as a 'blue carbon' sink – to soak up and store both biological carbon, aka green carbon, and excess brown

or black carbon, for example greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide – goes largely unsung.

What's troubling is that marine ecosystems are disappearing faster than any other ecosystem on the planet, even rainforests.

But this is no time to throw in the towel, said Achim Steiner, UN undersecretary-general and executive director of the UN Environment Programme. “Everyone in this room knows that acceptance of this [biodiversity loss] is no strategy at all.”

So, much of the conference was dedicated to filling the knowledge gaps in the hard science, be it debating biofuels or the genetic drivers of biodiversity, or tweaking predictive climate models. But whether or not the data will be translated into action is another issue, says Professor Graeme Cumming, who holds the UCT Pasvolsky Chair of Conservation Biology, and was also part of the local organising committee.

“There are lots of people working very hard to obtain information that's relevant to solving the problems, and there are lots of people starting or trying to start different initiatives to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss,” says Cumming. “The big question, really, is whether that all feeds into policy at the governmental level, and ultimately into action.”

(M.Morris@uct.ac.za)



West points the way

With so much uncertainty about the exact consequences of global warming over the next couple of decades, Dr Adam West's study – which earned him the Francesco Di Castri prize for best oral presentation by a young scientist at Diversitas OS2 – provides a useful glimpse. In 2007, West, a postdoctoral fellow at UCT and the University of California, Berkeley, erected a cluster of canopies over a bed of fynbos in the Silvermine Nature Reserve, letting light in but keeping the rain out. The aim of this drought-simulating exercise was to

measure the impact of climate change on the Western Cape's unique floral heritage. The results, now coming in, are “pretty interesting”, explains West, who takes up a lectureship at UCT's Department of Botany in 2010. They provide some evidence of how highly biodiverse ecosystems might respond to drought, a possible outcome of altered climate. West's findings can also feed into models that could be applied to ecosystems across the globe. In picture are West and colleagues Christina Moseley and Peter Hagen. (Photo by Rob Skelton.)

New structure will streamline transformation

UCT is reorganising its transformation facilities to serve students and staff more efficiently and effectively. From the beginning of next year, the new Transformation Services Office will co-ordinate the work of three existing departments: the Discrimination and Harassment Office (DISCHO), led by Francois Botha; HIV/AIDS Co-ordination UCT (HAICU), led by Cal Volks; and the Disability Services Unit, led by Reinette Poplestone.

Each of these offices will continue to operate with their current

staff and leadership, but they will be consolidated under the Director of Transformation – a new position that is expected to be filled by the beginning of the next term. The Director of Transformation will report to the deputy vice-chancellor in charge of transformation. Currently Professor Crain Soudien is the acting DVC.

“This new structure is designed to unite the work of these important services, develop synergies in their approaches, and consolidate their positive initiatives,” said Soudien. “Through such collaboration we

aim to create an institutional climate where everyone at UCT can operate at their highest potential.”

He added: “We've given long, careful thought to how transformation policies can be rolled out to greatest effect. And meanwhile, much effort has been made at different levels to speed the pace of transformation. For instance, students are making wonderful progress in peer-to-peer work. The Transformation Services Office will offer an umbrella structure to support these kinds of initiatives, and to serve the

broad range of needs and outlooks within UCT.”

An Ombud's office is also being created, and will be housed within the Transformation Services Office. Soudien explained that the Ombud will report directly to either the vice-chancellor or the Council. “By definition, the Ombud will operate independently of the university's authority structures,” he said. “The scope of the issues he or she addresses will provide additional checks and balances over the structures that manage complaints. It will

also provide an independent process for dealing with conflict, complaints and matters that cannot be satisfactorily resolved by existing offices. So it makes sense to have the Ombud work in loose partnership with the Transformation Services Office.” He said details of this position are still under discussion.

Invitations to apply for both the Director of Transformation and the Ombud will be advertised soon, and appointments are expected to be made by early next year.

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Platform launched to promote the value of archives



Remembering for the future: Dr Harriet Deacon is the director of the newly launched Archival Platform.

If archivists, museums and heritage workers feel isolated and forsaken right now, the new Archival Platform hopes to set that right.

Based at and "fostered by" UCT, the Archival Platform (www.archivalplatform.org) was established as an independent entity by Professor Carolyn Hamilton as a civic initiative of her National Research Foundation chair in archive and public culture, in collaboration with the Nelson Mandela Foundation and through wide sector discussions.

Billed as a network, advocacy and research project, the Platform aims to build a network of practitioners and resources in the sector. Easier said than done, given that those working in the

sector are from varied professions and far-flung locations.

"At the moment the sector is very fragmented," explains Platform director Dr Harriet Deacon.

Central to building the network is developing a new sense of context, argues Deacon.

"This is not about archivists and heritage professionals dusting items on a shelf," she says. "It's about understanding the broader significance of the profession, in building citizenship, a sense of identity and social cohesion."

Beyond this lie two major objectives: talking with government on one hand and the public on the other. In the case of the former, the Platform has launched the Letters to Lulu campaign,

urging those working in the field to write to the newly appointed Minister of Arts & Culture, Lulu Xingwana, to help her "feel the sense of the pulse of the sector".

"In the face of numerous failures in the national archival system, the Platform works to facilitate public engagement designed to ensure that government fulfils its mandate in relation to the national archival estate," says Deacon.

Next year, the Platform will reach out to communities; to those with a vested interest but, often, little say in the sector.

"There's no-one out there speaking on behalf of the public interest," cautions Hamilton. **MP**

Success in triplicate for TB researchers

Three specialists at UCT's Lung Infection and Immunity Unit have won substantial US fellowships for their doctoral studies on tuberculosis.

Recently, Drs Shahieda Adams, Jonny Peter and Richard van Zyl-Smit received Fogarty International Clinical Research Fellowships, awarded by the US National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Fogarty International Centre. In addition to the funding that comes with the fellowship, Adams, Peter and Van Zyl-Smit travelled to the US for orientation and training at the NIH in Bethesda, Maryland.

The trio's research focuses on various aspects of TB diagnosis and infection.

Adams, 44, an occupational medicine specialist, is running a screening programme – the first of its kind – for healthcare workers at primary-care clinics in high-burden settings in the Western Cape, including Delft, Nyanga and Khayelitsha. "My research is focused on evaluating tests for latent TB infection and the potential determinants of tuberculosis infection in healthcare workers, such as host, environmental and occupational factors," she explains.

In turn, Peter, 32, works on sputum induction, a technique used to get a

sputum sample for diagnosis when the patient is unable to produce spit naturally. He is investigating how sputum induction – it usually involves vapourised salt-water – stands up to other techniques, such as the more expensive and uncomfortable bronchoscopy. Peter is also trying to establish whether sputum induction, which is commonly used in hospitals, can be applied at primary-care clinics.

Finally, Van Zyl-Smit, 36, is trying to provide some laboratory evidence for the strongly-assumed but never

conclusively-proved link between smoking and TB. The problem is that while most are convinced that smoking is indeed a leading risk factor for TB, other co-occurring risk factors – alcohol abuse, overcrowded conditions, poverty – tend to muddy the waters. "No-one has ever shown what smoking is doing to the immune system when it comes to TB," says Van Zyl-Smit.

The three researchers are supervised by Associate Professor Keertan Dheeda. **MP**



TB triad: Dr Shahieda Adams, Dr Richard van Zyl-Smit and Dr Jonny Peter have received Fogarty International Clinical Research Fellowships for their doctoral work on tuberculosis.



Grow our own: (From left) Mohohlo Tsoeu, Prof Paul Bowen, Fatima Williams, Prof Paula Ensor, VC Dr Max Price, and Gina Ziervogel.

Praise for new academics programme

Vice-Chancellor Dr Max Price welcomed members of the New Academic Practitioners Programme (NAPP) at a function on 12 October, praising the programme as "innovative" and "well-established".

Launched in 2004 by the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED), NAPP serves as a support structure for newcomers to academia at UCT. In addition to an introduction session and a retreat later, NAPP also hosts workshops on topics related to

research, teaching and learning. These are presented either by CHED or the university's Research Office.

"NAPP is part of the university's transformation process, forging international links with Africa," said Price. "It is foremost an academic programme for the disadvantaged, and intended to accelerate familiarity with the university."

"We are short of black academics, so the university's strategy is to grow our own," Price quipped. **MP**

Law alumni reunite on campus



Among those at the law reunion were the following members of the class of 1989, (back) Clive Rubin and Shannon Hoxtor, and (front) Renee Dente, Marlese von Broembsen and Nicola Caine.

Graduates from 1979, 1984 and 1989 were back on campus recently for the Faculty of Law's annual Reunion Weekend, a tradition that was started in 2002 by former-dean, Professor Hugh Corder.

Some 600 – out of a total of 3 500 law alumni – have attended these weekends to date. With meetings in London, New York, Toronto,

Perth, Sydney, Hamburg, Nairobi, Kampala and Melbourne, as well as in South Africa, the proportion of law graduates who have met with their alma mater in the past few years is close to 30%, reported alumni co-ordinator Pauline Alexander.

This year, the biggest contingent was from the class of 1979, with graduates flying in from Atlanta,

Johannesburg, London, Melbourne, New York and Wellington.

Speaking at the Saturday dinner, the Dean, Professor PJ Schwikkard, said that the reunion offered an opportunity for alumni to reconnect with UCT and fellow alumni.

There was much laughter when Schwikkard read aloud an email from 1979 graduate Gair Cameron of Zimbabwe, who was keen to catch up with – according to a Judge Dennis Davis verdict, apparently – "the worst final-year LLB class". Davis, guest speaker at the dinner, duly denied ever issuing that particular verdict.

"In fact, I can say unequivocally that teaching is the part of my career that gives me the most satisfaction," he quipped.

Other speakers at the reunion included the LAWCO student team, and Emeritus Professor Solly Lee-man, the much-revered teacher of criminal law from 1963 to 2000.

Ceris Field of the class of 1984 said that being back on campus took him back to those days "when we studied hard, played hard and forged everlasting friendships". **MP**

New UCT Fellows must protect research drive



Celebration: New UCT Fellows include Prof Susan Bourne (second from right), Prof Jill Farrant (left); and Prof Vicki Lambert (far right), photographed with VC Dr Max Price.

"Fellows have a responsibility to protect the drive for research, and shake the lapels of the university," said Professor Tim Noakes, Discovery Health professor of exercise and sports science.

He was speaking at the Annual Fellows Dinner, a formal but celebratory event to welcome seven new fellows – four of them women – to UCT's ranks.

Noakes warned that if fellows wanted to increase their standing, they must do more to promote knowledge.

"Science is under attack," he said. "There is a 'dumbing down' of debate, and people can't judge what is true." Noakes also quipped

that "industry doesn't like science", because scientists have a tendency to come up with the 'wrong' results.

"Not everyone knows that research is hard work, which requires 100 percent commitment," said Noakes. "As a university, it is our role to teach, but in this new world, we must also do all we can to generate new knowledge."

(Chris.McEvoy@uct.ac.za)

Education failure is one of 'tragic proportions' - Kallaway



Hard talk: Emeritus Prof Peter Kallaway addresses the problems of post-apartheid education.

Problems facing South African education are "finally reaching tragic proportions", with failing literacy and numeracy rates, disastrous comparisons with equivalent testing internationally, teacher professional failure and curriculum dysfunctionality listed among current troubles.

So said Emeritus Professor Peter Kallaway, based at the University of the Western Cape and a UCT research associate, at a public lecture, *Education... What is to be Done?* on 15 October, in which he outlined problems facing post-apartheid education, and suggested possible solutions.

"My theory is that the basis of the problem lies in a world view that... is derived from a romantic view of edu-

cation," said Kallaway. "There was an assumption that if one removed all discipline in schools, one would liberate the students to pursue their own learning and thus cause 'a hundred flowers to bloom'."

The second issue, argued Kallaway, is the curriculum itself.

"To make matters immeasurably worse, the new curriculum did away with the very structure that would have given the majority of our modestly-trained teachers a raft to cling to – namely the textbook knowledge that was the major aspect of their own training as teachers."

He said the new curriculum requires a "serious investigation, which I think lies at the core of many of the

problems I have described – but this is the holy cow we are never allowed to criticise".

His proposals for improvement include a focus on training teachers, providing head teachers with the means to operate their schools effectively, and a drive to promote teaching as a profession.

Kallaway also called for a return to corporal punishment.

"If the teacher is deprived of the means of enforcing physical discipline in big, overcrowded classes, and [can't] promote positive learning, there is every chance of an explosive mix."

(Chris.McEvoy@uct.ac.za)

Two worlds meet in a snap

A new exhibition at the Centre for African Studies (CAS) Gallery, *Shared Legacies: The Alfred Duggan-Cronin and Edward S Curtis Photographs*, brings together snippets from two photographic collections that, while worlds apart, also have much in common.

The differences are mostly geographical and cultural. The Duggan-Cronin collection is made up of thousands of negatives and photographs of the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa, taken between 1919 and 1980 and now housed at the MacGregor Museum in Kimberley. In turn, Curtis' collection of images of Native Americans, titled *The North American Indian*, was published over 20 volumes between 1907 and 1930, and is regularly exhibited in the US.

The common ground is that both aimed to document these indigenous groups on film just as the modern world began to threaten their traditional ways of life.

It was the US Consulate in South Africa that first proposed the exhibition,

building on their growing association with the CAS Gallery. Gallery curators Siona O'Connell and Dale Washkansky – self-described "fledgling academics" – jumped at the chance to showcase the collections.

But as curators don't just hang pretty pictures, the two added their own interpretation to the works.

So, for example, some images were printed onto mirrors (so the viewers can see their own reflections in the photos), others flipped back to front (it's an act of censorship, as some things should just not be shown, says O'Connell), while others have been spiced up with suitable sound bites from cultural theorists such as Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes and Homi K Bhabha.

"We understand that there are problems with showing such ethnographic images, and as such it demands a different approach," says O'Connell. "We want to engage and challenge the viewers so they come away from the exhibition feeling slightly uncomfortable, asking, 'Why have they done this?'"

The approach worked on US



Memories: Curators Siona O'Connell (left) and Dale Washkansky, and US Consul General Dr Alberta Mayberry at the opening of *Shared Legacies*, which runs until 15 December.

Consul-General Dr Alberta Mayberry.

"This brown paper is baffling me," said an animated Mayberry to O'Connell, referring to the brown paper that covers the backs of the flipped photographs. "But it did make me talk."

And, added Mayberry, an African-American, the images reminded her of her ties to her grandfather, who was part Native American.

"This is my shared legacy," she said. **MP**

Kiss of life for lung-infection research



Discoveries: With new funding, Dr Greg Symons (left) and Dr Hoosain Khalfeey are pursuing studies into the nature and causes of lung infections.

Thanks to their new Discovery Foundation Academic Fellowships, Dr Hoosain Khalfeey and Dr Greg Symons have the funding to continue their potentially groundbreaking studies of lung infections over the next two years.

Khalfeey and Symons are both senior registrars at UCT's Department of Medicine and the Respiratory Clinic at Groote Schuur Hospital. Khalfeey's research is twofold.

Firstly, he hopes to shed some light on the most common causes of lung infections among HIV-positive patients. More specifically, he will look into the use of early bronchoscopies on HIV-positive patients with lung infections in an attempt to achieve a "definitive and rapid diagnosis" of such patients, who often pose a diagnostic conundrum for clinicians.

His second study will investigate the use of steroids as a parallel treat-

ment for severe community-acquired pneumonia. Conflicting evidence exists as to the value of steroids in treating pneumonia, says Khalfeey; which creates an excellent opportunity for further research, the results of which may significantly alter the way pneumonia is managed at present.

In turn, Symons' study deals with extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR TB), in which the TB is resistant to at least four drugs. Symons will look at the extent and severity of such drug resistance, which will include running a database of identified cases in the Cape Town metropole, now totalling 220 patients.

Symons will follow up with these patients in an attempt to get a handle on the disease and patients' responses to the current 18-month drug regime. (Only about 10% of patients are believed to recover.)

While XDR TB occurs across the globe, there are many unknowns, says Symons, such as its causes, and the post-hospitalisation experience of the other 90% of the patients, who are released after six months in hospital but must continue their treatment.

"We don't know what happens to them," he says.

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CONTESTING THE LEGACIES OF STEVE BIKO
(CONTEMPORARY BLACK HISTORY)

edited by Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander and Nigel Gibson

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Land Reform and Democracy in South Africa,
NRF Research Chair Initiative, Department of Sociology,
University of Cape Town

SPEAKERS

Mr Andile Mngxitama

Policy Adviser, Foundation for Human Rights, Johannesburg

Ms Amanda Alexander

PhD Candidate, Columbia University, United States

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All are welcome and entry is free. The book will be on sale at the event.

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First social responsiveness award winners announced



Community minded: Prof Di McIntyre (School of Public Health and Family Medicine) is one of three winners of UCT's new Social Responsiveness Awards.

Projects on disaster mitigation, gender violence and healthcare financing have won UCT's first Social Responsiveness Awards.

The winners are Dr Lillian Artz, director of the Gender, Health and Justice Research Unit; Dr Ailsa Holloway, director of the Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihood Programme (DiMP); and Professor Di McIntyre, of the School of Public Health and Family Medicine.

Founded by Artz in 2004, UCT's Gender, Health and Justice Research Unit in the Faculty of Health Sciences tackles the high levels of violence against women in South Africa.

Collaborating with NGOs and regularly commissioned by the government, the unit produces progressive research is used for evidence-based advocacy in women's rights.

Recently, a number of research and advocacy projects were undertaken to guide the law reform process on sexual offences.

With an impressive publication

record, the unit has earned an international reputation and is consulted regularly by international organisations.

Holloway's commitment to socially relevant research has led DiMP's exploration into poorly-understood disaster risks, such as informal fires, urban floods and severe storms. Since its formation in 1998, DiMP has developed into an institutional platform that generates new knowledge in the emerging field of disaster management science.

Holloway served as a technical adviser during parliamentary deliberations on the Disaster Management Bill, and co-ordinated the drafting of the National Disaster Management Framework. The resulting reform of disaster management legislation strengthened UCT's social engagement in the disasters domain.

As well as her professorship at UCT's School of Public Health and Family Medicine, McIntyre holds the South African research chair in health and wealth, and is the founder of the Health Economics Unit,

where she served as director for 13 years.

McIntyre's involvement in health care financing issues requires a combined role of academic and activist. She has served on many policy committees, such as the 1994 Health Care Finance Advisory Committee, where her input led to the removal of user fees at public sector primary health care facilities.

Most recently, McIntyre's engagement in the current debate on National Health Insurance, through workshops, opinion editorials and media interviews, has contributed to a better understanding of the complexities of financing a national health scheme. This role as a public intellectual has enhanced the university's engagement with national, continental and international challenges.

The awards are a part of UCT's Senate- and Council-approved Social Responsiveness Policy, adopted in 2008, which is aimed at encouraging an "enabling environment" for social responsiveness at the university. **MP**

Infant society to empower student parents



Study and play: (Left) Gill Balie (third-year B Com Chartered Accountant Stream) and Yvette Adams (second-year B Com Information Systems) propose a new society Student Parents on Campus for students who juggle dual roles.

Difficulties facing student parents and a desire to support struggling children has prompted UCT student Yvette Adams to launch a new UCT society, which is to be called Student Parents on Campus.

The initiative draws on Adams' own situation as the single parent of a two-year-old son, and is aimed at meeting the academic, social, and family needs of full-time students who also happen to be single parents.

The complexities of being a student and a parent, as well as the lack of support and empowerment for this special group, are a problem. According to

the UCT Educare Centre, 35 of the 75 children attending the centre belong to student parents.

Adams and fellow student Gill Balie feel that a new society was the best way to go. The society, Adams said, would be an interactive forum where parents can share advice, experiences, resources and academic assistance – all towards living a more balanced life, as they often spend little time with their children.

The society is completing the final draft of its mission and vision statements, which will include an 'outreach' element aimed at encouraging and sup-

porting pregnant high-school learners. Reflecting on how difficult her past two years at UCT have been, Adams says:

"You live for a night out, but instead of going out clubbing you wake up at 2am to get to your books because that is the only time you get to study."

And when a child is sick and cannot go to crèche, parents have to stay home and miss lectures.

Balie, for example, was made to fail a test because of such a situation.

As if the rigid administrative formalities were not enough, there is also a stigma attached to being young single parents.

There is a notion that it's a self-made problem, with immoral overtones, which the young single parent should 'pay' for, said Adams.

"We don't promote pregnancy, but want to encourage young parents to study further, and reassure them that having a child is not the end of the world."

The society needs 25 members to be recognised as such at UCT, and Adams therefore wishes to appeal to other young parents, mothers and fathers, to indicate their interest in this venture and to come on board.

Yvette Adams can be contacted on 082 698 1767 or via email at yveteyadams1@gmail.com **MP**



UCT's membership of the Worldwide Universities Network was formalised in a ceremony at the University of Sydney. At the ceremony, UCT's Prof Jo Beall joined Prof John Hearn in signing the Partnership Heads of Agreement.

UCT joins the Worldwide Universities Network

UCT has become the latest partner in the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), making it the first African member of this global network.

"Its key objectives are aligned with UCT's own strategic vision, and we believe that our membership of WUN will help extend our partnership profile and enhance our goal of internationalisation with an Afropolitan niche," said deputy vice-chancellor Professor Jo Beall.

WUN is a partnership of research-led universities from Europe, North America, South East Asia and Australia. By fostering and encourag-

ing collaboration between members, WUN brings together the experience, equipment and expertise necessary to tackle the big issues currently facing societies, governments, corporations and education.

WUN chief executive Professor John Hearn of the University of Sydney said: "On behalf of all partners, I am delighted to welcome the University of Cape Town, with its many research strengths, to WUN. UCT brings complementary expertise to the partnership, and will create new opportunities and experiences for staff and students throughout the network." **MP**



EDUCATION NEWS FROM AFRICA AND THE WORLD

The Free State ANC has come down hard on the **UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE'S** decision to withdraw its charges against four students who created a racial furore at the university in 2008.



Jonathan Jansen

Neither UFS rector Jonathan Jansen, who announced the reconciliatory decision at his inauguration last week, nor the university could speak on behalf of

the victims in the name of so-called reconciliation, the ANC said in a statement.

Despite earlier reports to the contrary, athlete Caster Semenya has said she's primed and ready to write her first-year university examinations at the **UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**, where she is a sports science student.

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY'S transformation plan, Vision 2015 – aiming for 15% black staff and 34% percent black, coloured and Indian undergraduate students by 2015 – "leaves much to be desired", according to Parliament's portfolio committee on higher education and training.

A student was hit above the eye by a rubber bullet during a protest at the **MANGOSUTHU UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY** in Umlazi, KwaZulu-

Natal.

About R2.3m dedicated to a three-year programme to strengthen 12 of SA's rural further education and training (FET) colleges in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape would be used for labour market research to better align college education with market needs, Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande has said. Nzimande has promised to increase FET enrolment from about 400 000 to one million by 2015, despite concerns about poor exam results.

Ethiopia's **ADAMA UNIVERSITY** has launched its first self-developed, campus-wide eLearning environment at the university. Until just recently, the campus had only five PCs, connected with a very slow line, for nearly 6 500 students, but that number has now grown



to over 600 computers.

A This Day correspondent was attacked and injured while covering the protest of staff unions against Lagos State University's vice-chancellor, Professor Lateef Hussein.

Following previous delays and crises, **NIGERIA'S EDUCATION MINISTER**, Dr Sam Egwu, has ordered the Governing Council of the University of Benin to appoint a substantive vice-chan-

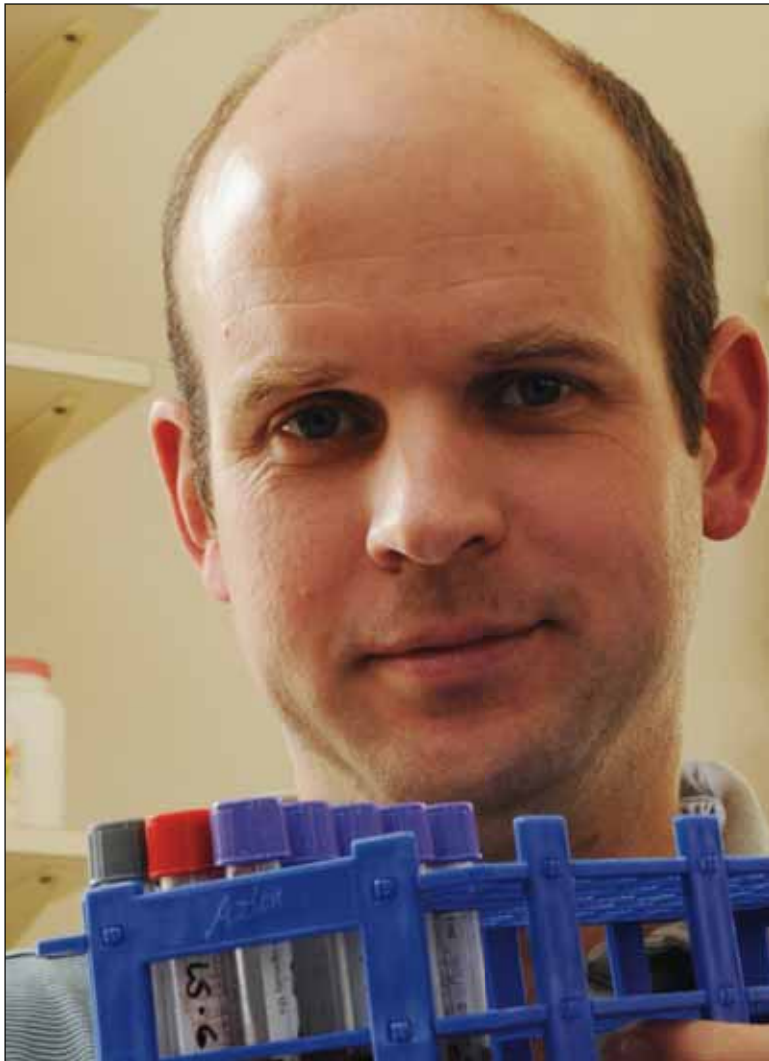
cellor within six weeks.

Even though tuition and fees in the US increased in 2008, the amount students borrowed in private loans declined by almost 50%, according to the first widely-accepted estimate of that drop. A significant reduction in loans was expected because of the turbulence in the credit markets.

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY will open a campus in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, one of a growing number of American universities opening branches in the oil-rich region.

Social scientist Kian Tajbakhsh, an academic who holds both American and Iranian citizenship, was sentenced to more than 12 years in prison by a court in Tehran for fomenting unrest against the Iranian government.

Researcher puts TB screening to the test



Testing times: Dr Richard van Zyl-Smit has called some standard TB-testing regimes into question.

New findings by UCT's Dr Richard van Zyl-Smit could up-end some widely-held tenets of tuberculosis testing.

Based at the Lung Infection and Immunity Unit, Van Zyl-Smit, 36, argues for a new TB-testing regime in a paper published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, aka the *Blue Journal*.

Although opinion is divided and the issue hotly debated, the standard TB-testing protocols are straightforward: either a single blood-based test, as recommended by the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, or, as they do in the UK and Canada, a skin test followed by the (pricier) blood test for confirmation.

It's the latter protocol that first-author Van Zyl-Smit addresses in his paper, *Within-Subject Variability and Boosting of T-Cell Interferon- γ Responses after Tuberculin Skin Testing*.

The origin of his argument is that in the skin test, known as the tuberculin skin test, a small dose of purified TB-protein derivative is injected just under the top layer of the skin on the inner forearm. The harmless protein acts as an antigen, so if the person has been exposed to the TB bacterium (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*) before, or is still carrying it, the protein shot would trigger an immune response in the skin almost instantly.

Van Zyl-Smit's concern is that the

skin test may leave traces of the TB protein in the system, which would then be picked up by the blood test. That could lead, mistakenly, to a positive diagnosis.

"The big question is, if you do the skin test first, does it affect the blood test?" he explains.

In their own study, Van Zyl-Smit and his collaborators did three to four blood tests – using two standard kits – with some of the subjects, to illustrate the natural variability in the body's T-cell interferon- γ responses. These interferons are proteins produced by the cells of the immune system (those 'helper' T-cells) when the body's under attack from 'invaders' such as bacteria, viruses or parasites.

Once he'd established a baseline interferon-response level, Van Zyl-Smit conducted the skin test with his subjects, followed by a second series of blood tests over three months.

As he suspected, the second set of blood tests indicated that the subjects were carrying the TB bacterium, when in fact they weren't.

"Which means you shouldn't give a blood test after a skin test, which most international guidelines suggest you can," Van Zyl-Smit sums up. "You need to interpret the blood tests cautiously."

However, with both blood-test kits, Van Zyl-Smit did show that there is a three-day window period after the skin

test within which interferon-response counts remain normal. But by day four the interferon levels had jumped sharply, and kept climbing for the next 81 days, after which Van Zyl-Smit stopped his tracking.

His results are of particular importance to those who undergo serial testing, such as healthcare workers who work with TB patients and who, statistics show, are hands-down the ones at greatest risk and in need of constant monitoring. False tests could mean regular but unnecessary treatment that could, in turn, lead to complications, such as drug resistance.

"This study is helpful to clinicians, as they can now be reassured that results from the blood test are accurate and valid if performed within three days of the skin test," says his supervisor, Associate Professor Keertan Dheda. "It also provides clinicians with cut-points defining how the test should be interpreted within specific contexts."

Van Zyl-Smit's paper – his first big one – in the journal, also known as the American Thoracic Society's *Blue Journal* (the colour of the cover), came as a double whammy.

Not only does the journal have the highest impact factor in the world among respiratory-medicine journals, but the paper also earned the authors coverage in the editorial, marking it as the article's first official citation.

(M.Morris@uct.ac.za)

New method recycles water and salt from coal mining

A new method for recycling the salty water produced by coal mining could benefit both the mining industry and the environment, according to an award-winning paper by Professor Alison Lewis, head of UCT's Crystallisation and Precipitation Unit in the Department of Chemical Engineering.

Lewis was awarded the best-paper prize at the Water in Mining Conference, held in Perth, Australia, by the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy and the Sustainable Minerals Institute, for *Worth its Salt: How eutectic freeze crystallisation can be used to recover water and salt from hypersaline mine waters*.

Co-authored by PhD researchers Dyllon Randall and Sarashree Reddy, master's student Rinesh Jivanji and research officer Jeeten Nathoo, the paper proposes a protocol methodology for testing the technical and economic feasibility of eutectic freeze crystallisation (EFC) for South African coal mines.

Nathoo explains that briny water produced in mining is often dumped into drainage areas, where the water evaporates, leaving its minerals behind. The problem with this method is that the water is lost, and there is always the danger of seepage.

"It's a costly and non-sustainable method," he says.

Another method is to boil the

water, but this too has its problems. The process is energy-consuming, the left-over minerals still have to be dumped, and again, the water is lost. In a country like South Africa, where water-saving is critical, this method is anything but ideal.

The EFC method not only addresses the water problem, but allows for the recycling of the extracted salts. Here, the process is to freeze the brine, which separates the salts from the water. Mine water in South Africa is significantly complex, so as the water cools, different salts, in their pure form, can be extracted at different temperatures.

The result is not only pure, drinkable water, but pure salts,



Brainfreeze: Prof Alison Lewis with project collaborator, Leslie Petrik of the University of the Western Cape

which can be resold, rather than dumped. And the process consumes about one sixth of the energy of the boiling method. So it's a win-win concept, for the environment as well as the mining industry.

The method is not without its problems, says Nathoo. EFC equipment is expensive, and the process is anything but tried and tested. Presently, the Netherlands has the only operational EFC plant in the world. But in the long term, Nathoo maintains, EFC makes economic sense.

With heavyweights like Anglo Coal and Coaltech supporting Lewis' research, EFC may soon become a South African reality.

(Chris.McEvoy@uct.ac.za)

Teaching overlooked in academic life, says award-winner Burch

Bringing clinicians to her lectures, basing teaching on best practices and using accessible learning material are teaching techniques that have earned UCT's Professor Vanessa Burch a top accolade.

Burch, who holds the chair in clinical medicine in the Department of Medicine, received the 2009 National Excellence in Teaching and Learning Award from the Council for Higher Education and the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa.

Teaching is an often overlooked part of an academic's life, notes Burch, winner of a UCT Distinguished Teacher Award in 2004.

"I believe the award is an important step in the right direction, because teaching excellence needs to be rewarded in the same manner as



Prof Vanessa Burch.

research excellence."

The honour is bestowed on educators working in tertiary institutions, to support excellence in teaching and

learning in the sector and to generate academics who are able to provide leadership in teaching in their disciplines, institutions and regions. The award is also offered as a means of generating debate and public awareness about the ingredients of teaching excellence.

"This award required excellence in both teaching and education-related research, and as such, closes the gap between the two critical domains that form the pillars of higher education."

Burch bases her own teaching on the philosophy that teachers should teach from the perspective of their students, and that teaching should take place in real workplace settings.

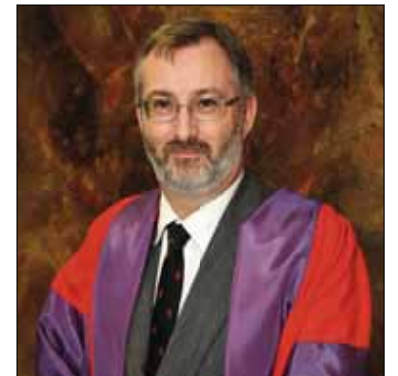
"Medicine is essentially an apprenticeship, and I strive to be a role model as well as an educator," she added. **MP**

A god among Caesars

There were signs and omens aplenty that the Roman emperor Augustus – the first – was destined for not just great things, but also divinity. According to African biographer Suetonius, anyway, said Professor David Wardle in his inaugural lecture, *The Roman Emperor as God and Man: An African biographer's perspective*.

In his lecture, delivered on 14 October, Wardle tackled his theme in three parts: – Suetonius, the author of *The Life of Augustus* (if not black, than at least African by virtue of his family's association with a spot in modern-day Algiers); the legendary and bar-setting Augustus; and the phenomenon he referred to as the 'ruler cult' in the Roman Empire.

While this ruler cult has much in common with the personality cults of more recent times – Hitler in Germany, Stalin in Russia and the Kims



in North Korea – it also stands apart from these in one marked regard, said Wardle.

"What is striking about the ancient manifestation is its overwhelmingly religious nature, ie its expression in forms of worship that were given to the gods."

(Listen to the full lecture at <http://www.uct.ac.za/news/multimedia/sound/>.) **MP**

SHAWCO puts high schoolers on a fast track

For a few hours on Saturday mornings the Students' Health And Welfare Centres Organisation (SHAWCO) buses in 200 learners from 10 high schools in townships around Cape Town, to receive tutoring from Model C teachers in English, physics, life science and maths.

Since 2004, SHAWCO has been helping high school students in local townships to improve their results in these critical courses. Last year the UCT group began bussing Grade 12 students to UCT campus on Saturdays, so they could study in top-class facilities and glimpse the wider academic world.

Coming to study at UCT once a week is "a dream come true", says Fatiema Isaacs of Mount View High School. "I'm not even in my first year [of university], and here I am."

The Saturday School students see these weekend classes as a doorway to opportunity. They dream of careers in accounting, civil engineering, paleoan-

thropology, microbiology and medicine. Not all of them plan to come to UCT next year, but they say that coming here now has raised their expectations for the future.

"SHAWCO started the Saturday School in part to raise students' aspirations," says Carl Herman, SHAWCO's programme co-ordinator. "We did a survey one year, asking township high school students what they would like to see improve in their schools. Most of them said, 'Nothing'. They thought their classrooms were fine. But they had never seen a real laboratory, or had their own computer centre. They didn't know what they were missing."

The Saturday School includes a career guidance programme. Counsellors help the students access forms and fill them out for higher education (not just at UCT) and other skills programmes. Last year, Saturday School was able to go a big step further and provide full three-year bursaries to four learners to come to UCT. The bursaries were pro-



vided by Bombardier, the lead company in the consortium that is building the Gautrain in Gauteng..

Bursary recipient Zanele Lwana of Bulumko High School in Khayelitsha has been honing her academic skills

since Grade 10. So when SHAWCO came to her school, she signed up for the afternoon tutoring programme.

"But I was not selected for the academic programme, which would help us in key subjects like maths, biology,

English and physics," she says. Instead, she was selected for a programme in information technology. But she decided not to let a bureaucratic hurdle stand in her way.

"I just went [to the academic programme] anyway. I was not in the register, but they said if I wanted to come, I could. And it really did make a difference." Such a difference, in fact, that in Grade 10 Lwana became the top student at Bulumko High.

"It was not teachers who were giving you information, but university students. They were more like your peers, so you could feel free to ask anything. They really helped us."

By the time she entered Grade 12 and qualified for Saturday School, Lwana was beginning to think about university. "To me, UCT was the most scary place in the world!" Today Lwana is completing her first year of studies in microbiology, thanks to the bursary she received.

(Pat.Lucas@uct.ac.za)

Big friendly giants



Tea for two: VC Dr Max Price (left) and DVC Prof Danie Visser take tea with children at the UCT Educare Centre.

UCT Educare Centre's dream of more space could be realised, following a visit by vice-chancellor Dr Max Price and his senior management team on 14 October. Price, accompanied by deputy vice-chancellor Professor Danie Visser, chatted and played with the young ones, and held discussions with centre leadership.

This was part of his programme of weekly visits to departments to get to know the university better. "The centre is an important function that supports staff and students by enabling them to work and study, despite having kids," he said.

Marilyn Petersen-Sanders, co-ordinator at the centre, said one of the challenges for the centre was the lack of space to accommodate special classes and students' outreach programmes. **MP**

Farewell to doyen of information systems

Professor Dewald Roode, seen by many as the father of information systems (IS) as an academic discipline in South Africa, has died after an accidental fall at Cape Town International Airport while on his way home to Pretoria.. He was 69.



and the establishment of a critical cohort of over 30 doctoral graduates." Roode was known and respected throughout the world.

Professor Kevin Johnston, former head of Information Systems at UCT, said Roode's contribution to South Africa and UCT in terms of PhD output had been prodigious.

A visiting professor in the Department of Information Systems in the Faculty of Commerce, he recently received the LEO Award at the International Conference on Information Systems in Paris.

Paying tribute to a life well lived, head of IS Professor Jean-Paul van Belle said: "We were honoured to work with such an inspirational colleague. Professor Johannes Dewald Roode has without any doubt made more impact on the academic discipline of information systems on the African continent than anyone else. His legacy includes the strong promotion of a qualitative research tradition,

"No-one else has developed as many doctoral students in IS as Professor Roode. He transferred his extensive knowledge to a host of academics at various universities in South Africa including the University of Pretoria, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Nelson Mandela University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal."

Roode is survived by Annemarie, his wife of 46 years, his son Maarten, daughter Demri, and grandchildren Mila, Marli, Johannes Dewald and Annie. **MP**

Dinner date to support retiring colleagues

The Chair of Council, the Most Reverend Njongonkulu Ndungane, will host a dinner for retiring staff on Thursday 12 November 2009 in the Smuts Dining Hall, at 19h00 for 19h30. All staff are invited to attend this dinner to support the retirees.

The cost of the three-course

dinner, which includes a welcoming cocktail and red or white wine, will be R145 per person.

To book a place at the dinner, please contact Rosina van de Rheede at 021 650 4468 or email rosina.vanderheede@uct.ac.za by 9 November 2009.

Erratum

In Vol 28#15 of *Monday Paper*, in the article *A Day in the Life of the Events Management Unit*, it was reported that 700 cases of wine had been stolen. That should have read seven cases. (See article below.)

A Day in the Life of the Events Management Unit

The Events Management Unit, part of the Communication and Marketing Department headquartered at La Grotta on middle campus, is staffed by events manager Judy Smit, events co-ordinators Edwina Kannemeyer, Rosina van de Rheede and Ursula Ross, as well as Michelle Moses, the administrative assistant.

What does the unit do on a day-to-day basis?

From conceptualising and planning, to organising and hands-on managing, the team is responsible for 90 or so events or functions that take place at UCT in any given year, and they entertain about 24 000 people in the process. Events could be as small as organising a welcome tea or as big as hosting a gala dinner for heads of state. Their work deals very much with logistics and attention to detail; from welcoming guests, to planning seating arrangements, to timing the

programme and solving safety and risk factors for the function. The events team also provides an advisory service, and support, to the broader university community. The process begins in December when Smit and other colleagues meet with the vice-chancellor to discuss his calendar in conjunction with the events rolling list, based on annual and ad hoc events. She then meets with the event co-ordinators to allocate the scheduled events for the year. "That is when the real work starts. We need to know every detail about every function," says Kannemeyer. "We need to understand what the objective of the event is, the guest list, budget, the audience, the theme; and then we plan the logistics within specific (and at times, very tight) deadlines". At any given time the co-ordinators are working on three to four functions simultaneously – "juggling many balls at the same time".

What are the challenges?

Every function has its own challenges, and organisers must think on their feet and find solutions quickly. They need to do so while portraying a positive front, regardless of the pressure and operational problems that may occur during a function. UCT has limited venues for functions, and due to the annual growth in demand, the team is often forced to negotiate with Venue Bookings and clients for space. "The success of any event is dependent on attendance," explains Van de Rheede. Kannemeyer adds: "There is a perception that no response to an invitation means we should know that invited guests will attend and, as a result, we spend a lot of time chasing guests to respond." On the day of the function it often happens that people who have not responded arrive anyway, forcing organisers to shuffle other attendees around to make space for them. The team often works within a limited

budget. "But we must make plans to deliver the best function regardless of the budget," says Ross. In addition, there is always the risk posed by environmental conditions. "We need to have Plan B in case of rain or wind", says Kannemeyer. "It is attention to the finer details that contributes to the quality and success of any event."

What are the highs and lows of the job?

"It is highly pressurised and deadline driven, and every day is different. The team works very long hours," explains Smit. 'No-shows' at an event can be devastating. Organisers are perfectionists, and the lack of acknowledgement is a low point. The perception is that event management is only about food and wine, though every event has other objectives as well. But at the end of the day, the work is exciting, and organisers tend to meet interesting and very

high-profile people.

"Graduation is the highlight of the annual events calendar, when the team organises celebratory functions for the approximately 3 600 graduating students and their families after each graduation ceremony in December, and approximately 600 in June."

What is the weirdest thing they've encountered?

From having seven cases of wine disappear from a locked storeroom overnight, and seeing food vanish in an incredibly short time, to guests demanding to be seated in reserved seats. But one that tops them all is when they invited a particular guest and another person (who happened to share the same name and surname) turned up instead. "He said he did wonder why he had been invited to that function, but didn't question it," says Smit. "We invited him to stay for a drink and enjoy himself." **MP**

Good sports

UCT's annual sports awards took place on Friday 23 October. Too late for press, we have highlighted some of the sportspeople in line for colours or major sports awards



LAURA BARRETT, water polo

Like many others there, Laura Barrett had a few Bambi-in-the-headlights moments at the 13th FINA World Aquatics Championships, held in Rome over July and August.

There she was in one of the world's most beautiful and popular cities, appearing in only her second international event with the senior South African water polo squad. The state-of-the-art Foro Italo sports complex – big screen and all – was unlike anything she'd seen before.

And was that Michael Phelps strolling around the Village Roma09?

In the water, the team had been thrown into the deep end as well. Placed in the 'Pool of Death', South Africa was up against tournament favourites Canada and Australia (who would finish second and sixth respectively).

Barrett had to compete against women twice her size, some sporting Olympic tattoos.

"It's something I couldn't have prepared for because I didn't know what to expect," says Barrett, 23. "The game wasn't just faster, but so much

more physical – they were on you all the time."

Just as they'd done at the FINA World League event in Lille, France, two months before, the ill-prepared South Africa – Barrett met at least one teammate for the first time at the opening match – had to settle for the wooden spoon. But Barrett's far from throwing in the towel.

"I just tell myself I'm going to learn from this," she says. "I'm here and I'm going to play. Even if it is against Australia."

And as coach to youngsters at Rustenburg Girls' High School and in the Western Province school squad – plus baby sister Nicola, 16, who represented the SA juniors in Russia this year – she has the chance to nurture the next generation of water polo talent.

"I'd like to see those girls, who have that love and that passion for the game and are good enough, to carry on from here."

As for her own game, the 2016 Olympics is still within reach, she believes. Then she might just get a tattoo of her own.

THANDEKILE SEATLHOLO, wheelchair basketball

Thandekile Seatlholo gets hurt a lot. She falls out of her wheelchair even more. But don't worry, it's mostly her own fault. The thing is, Seatlholo, 19, will be the first to confess to an irrepressibly aggressive streak in her wheelchair basketball game. It's a feature of her playing that's spooked rivals, annoyed teammates and – one foul and one yellow card too far – caused coaches no end of vexation. But that hot-blooded attitude has also earned her a spot in the South African women's side that finished a very-impressive third at the Americas Women's qualification tournament in Guatemala in June. Wheelchair basketball started as therapy for the Soweto-born Seatlholo after a disabling car accident in



2000. But her interest and career took off after she moved to Hope School

in Johannesburg, where the game became an everyday thing. Soon she was playing for the untouchable Central Gauteng side and then for a string of maybe-not-so-invincible conference teams. But she found her temperamental home with the SA side this year, where her on-court passion is encouraged. "My captain loves it," says Seatlholo. ("If you don't have a bruise after the game, it means you haven't played," says captain Fahiema Beckles.) The team is still in its infancy, but with a training camp in Belgium, the Guatemala competition and a few other events in the pipeline, Seatlholo gets to feed another obsession – travelling. On-court that may be frowned on, but not so off it. "I just want to see the world," she says.

JULIA CHEN, bouldering

Julia Chen scrambled up a lot of trees when she was younger, but thinks her piano training has probably played a bigger part in her rapid climb – get it? – to bouldering success.

Just two years after first taking up the sport, Chen, 24, has become the top woman boulderer in the country. And this year she's scaled some tricky rocks, earning some seriously high grades, including a 7B+ first ascent. (In the discipline, the Fontainebleau system grades climbs by difficulty from 1 to 8C+.)

Bouldering, for the uninitiated, is done mostly on

outdoor boulders and without a rope and, unlike sport climbing, without anchors, grips or bolts. And although it is normally limited to very short climbs over a crash pad – to cushion any falls – climbs can go up to eight metres.

So as with any rock climbing, a strong grip comes in handy. Which is why Chen figures she had the upper hand on others.

"Playing the piano really strengthens your fingers," says the architecture student.

The ap-

peal of bouldering, she adds, is the novelty of the sport.

"It's always a challenge. There's something new and different every time."

Such as the spot at Red Hill in Simon's Town where, in May, she earned the national open title. Yes, she was pipped by American student Sidney Scanlon, but being the top South African there, Chen took the national honours.

And if climbers want to polish their technique, they couldn't ask for a better outdoor gym than right here.

"In South Africa, the possibilities are endless," says Chen. "There's so much rock, so much potential."

"Even in Cape Town, there are so many boulders, so many crags that haven't been climbed yet."

MICHAEL MALAHE, fencing

There are up-sides and down-sides to a 'small' sport like fencing, says Michael Malahe, who made his very respectable South African senior debut this year. One of the pros is that, because of the small pool of good fencers, you can fight your way up the rankings in quick time. The biggest con is the lack of quality sparring partners. "It's very frustrating to train with the same small group of people for long periods, because it's easy to get into a rut where we become too comfortable with each other," says the imposing Malahe, 21, an épéist who at 1.89m (6' 3") has a distinct reach advantage over his local

rivals. So even though he gets to train with three SA fencers at UCT – Yasmin Hankel, Giselle Vicatos and Jacques Viljoen – what really sharpens his game is international competition, which he had plenty of at the All African Fencing Championships in Dakar, Senegal, in August, and the World Fencing



Championships in Antalya, Turkey, in September and October. It's here that experience counts most, says Malahe.