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Monday Paper

Newspaper of the University of Cape Town



8 – 21 November 2010

Volume 29#17



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

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UCT's Sitas heads task team to reinvigorate humanities

Few can fault the intentions behind South Africa's offensive over the past 15 years to nurture and produce the next generation of life scientists, engineers, technologists and captains of commerce.

The government hasn't been shy to inject money into these areas. For example, Naledi Pandor, minister of science and technology, recently revealed that the state's investment in research and development has increased five-fold over the past 11 years – from about R4 billion to R21 billion. (However, the country still fell short – by ever so little – of its investment targets, she pointed out.)

But while the state's purse-keepers have rightly been supportive to some extent towards these sciences, the humanities and social sciences appear to have fallen through the cracks. This turn of events hasn't escaped the attention of those in academia and government.

So no surprise then that Dr Blade Nzimande, minister of higher education and training, has set up a task team to develop, by June 2011, a charter to establish the importance of scholarship in the human and social sciences.

"Now is the time," said Nzimande, "for the teaching of and research in social sciences and the humanities to take their place again at the leading edge of our struggle for transformation and development of South African society."

The lower status of the humanities is costing the country dearly, according to Professor Ari Sitas of UCT's Department of Sociology, who has been appointed to head the task team.

"It's affecting the quality of humanities and social-science projects," says Sitas. "And most of the people sitting as directors-general or at the chief directorate level are products of the humanities and social science."

Sitas highlights three concerns. The first is the "palpable decline" in the number of doctoral graduates, particularly South African graduates and in key disciplines. Secondly, the emphasis on vocational training – in for the bachelor's degree and out directly after – has undermined the production of 'thinking' graduates. That, thirdly, leads to a skills disparity when our graduates are measured against their international



Full steam ahead: Prof Ari Sitas will lead a task team that will look to reinvigorate the humanities and social sciences in South Africa.

counterparts; around a negotiating table, for example.

To carry out its objectives, the task team – Dr Sarah Mosoetsa from the University of the Witwatersrand will assist Sitas – will call on experts both local and international. Already they have established a South African reference group, which will include Dr Shamil Jeppie of UCT's new Institute for the Humanities in Africa (HUMA). An international reference group is also being finalised that it is hoped will include leading academics from Brazil, China, France, India, Jordan, the Netherlands, Norway, Senegal, and the US.

Fortunately much of the legwork has already been done by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), says Sitas. ASSAf was one of the first organisations to point out that the humanities and social sciences had fallen into neglect. Among its publications is a report on peer review of scholarly journals in the social sciences, released in August this year.

As part of its own fact-finding, the ministerial task team will host workshops and interviews with local stakeholders, including deans, vice-chancellors

and research directors, as well as leading scholars around the country. It will also borrow from the work of others, including ASSAf, the Public Service Commission and research by institutions outside of the higher-education system.

"It's a global phenomenon, this emphasis on the knowledge economy, on science, engineering, the new information technologies, and so forth," says Sitas. "But if you look at the US, for example, they have not damaged their top institutions; but here we're starting to worry that even our top institutions, including UCT, are starting to suffer."

But while the likes of UCT are still able to attract funding for a HUMA or the Centre for Curating the Archive, others may not be so blessed. That, worries Sitas, could lead to further inequities in the system, with pockets of excellence in one or two corners of the country, and a vacuum elsewhere.

But the task team will have to weigh up an array of options and models, and then see what's feasible, says Sitas.

"We're going to explore everything. And then try to be pragmatic, but visionary at the same time."

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Hands-on physics

It was show-and-tell time for the Department of Physics on 28 October when over 300 Grade 11 pupils from 30 of the Peninsula's high schools converged on UCT for the annual Phenomenal Physics afternoon.

The action-packed and hands-on experiments and demonstrations were geared to interest them in careers in the sciences, specifically in physics.

Demonstrations explored the physics of waves (sound and light), fluid mechanics, electricity, magnetism and cryogenics.

The department's Dr Spencer Wheaton said that the afternoon is all about showing, rather than explaining or talking about physics.

He said he hoped that learners had left the event with a greater appreciation of physics as a science, and for the centuries of study and development of theories and technologies that impact on their daily lives – and hence that physics is an exciting and relevant academic pursuit.

Potted bio

Born in Cyprus, Prof Ari Sitas has a PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand, graduating in 1984. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he was a consultant to unions, labour and government programmes, and cultural groups. He was a senior Fulbright research fellow at the University of California at Berkeley from 1993 to 1994, returning there as a guest senior fellow in 1999 and 2000. Over the past 10 years he has served on both South African and international committees and associations, and was a guest professor in Germany and India. He headed the School of Sociology and Social Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal from 2005 to 2007. He is also a poet and an award-winning dramatist. Sitas is currently a senior professor of sociology at UCT.

Bonsai operas set SA in macro-focus

Busting the myths about Saartjie Baartman, dissecting xenophobia and reflecting on the assassination of Chris Hani are challenging subjects – even more so in the medium of opera, and when limited to only 20 minutes.

But this is the composers' achievement in *Five:20 – Operas Made in South Africa*. Comprising five new 20-minute mini-operas, each based on iconic issues in South Africa's history, this collaboration between the UCT Opera School, Cape Town Opera and UCT's Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts will be performed from 21 to 27 November to celebrate the centenary of UCT's South African College of Music (SACM).

Associate Professor Hendrik Hofmeyr of the SACM is the co-composer (with Fiona Herbst) and librettist of *Saartjie*, directed by Geoffrey Hyland. Hofmeyr hopes the short opera will get closer to the truth about Baartman than the modern misconceptions about her life.

"Baartman was more in control of her own destiny than many would like to believe," says Hofmeyr, explaining that Baartman had negotiated a very lucrative contract for her public appearances, and – contrary to popular

belief – didn't appear naked, but in a full body stocking.

Hofmeyr also notes that some of her famous publicity photographs have a copyright notice announcing Baartman as the owner. "This makes her one of South Africa's first publishers," he says.

Tronkvoël is inspired by poet-activist Breyten Breytenbach's experiences in prison. Breytenbach was sentenced to seven years for high treason by the apartheid regime, after he was betrayed by the ANC while illegally in the country. Composed by Martin Watt and Alwyn Roux and directed by Marcus Desando, *Tronkvoël* makes operatic use of the artist's poetry.

Bongani Ndodana-Breen is the composer of the chamber opera *Hani*. Working with librettist Mfundu Vundla, Ndodana-Breen has produced an operatic interpretation of the life and death of communist icon Chris Hani, and poses some difficult questions. Also directed by Marcus Desando, *Hani*'s unflinching look at post-apartheid South Africa questions whether those who died for South Africa's freedom would be happy with the current state of affairs.

As well as directing *Saartjie*, Hyland also directs *Out of Time* and *From*



Short stories: Prof Geoffrey Highland directing the cast of *Words from a Broken String* with conductor Prof Kamal Kahn (seated).

a Broken String. Composed by P  ter Louis van Dijk, *Out of Time* takes on the current issues of prejudice, miscommunication and xenophobia through a journey on a 'black taxi'.

From a Broken String, composed by Peter Klatzow and featuring libret-

tist Michael Williams, explores the timeless themes of language, culture and displacement through the story of Lucy Lloyd, the nineteenth-century linguist who recorded the now-extinct language of the San people.

"We aren't constantly creating

new operas," says conductor Kamal Khan. "There are so many exciting new singers being discovered in South Africa, but what will they sing? They should be able to sing their own stories."

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Well-cited four stand out in AIDS research

A paper by four UCT scholars has been named as the most cited clinical-sciences article in 2009 to appear in the journal *AIDS*, the official journal of the International AIDS Society.

The four – Honorary Associate Professor Stephen Lawn, Associate Professor Landon Myer, Associate Professor Linda-Gail Bekker and Professor Robin Wood, all linked with the Institute of Infectious Disease and Infectious Medicine – were recently informed of the award, officially announced at the XVIIIth

International AIDS Conference in Vienna in July. Their winning paper was titled *Tuberculosis-associated immune reconstitution disease:*

Incidence, risk factors and impact in an antiretroviral treatment service in South Africa, and appeared in *AIDS* in January 2007.

In the article, the authors wrote about the treatment of patients with both HIV and tuberculosis at a community-based ART service in Gugulethu, Cape Town. Their study described how HIV-infected patients with very low blood counts of CD4

cells – the T-helper cells that are essential for immune function – and who start ART during the early stages of treatment for TB, could develop what's known as immune reconstitution disease (IRD).

As ART improves the CD4 count, it amplifies the immune system's response to the TB infection, worsening the symptoms and clinical features of the tuberculosis. Fortunately, mortality risk from IRD is low.

At last count on the Web of Science database, the paper had earned

86 citations since 2007, with a high of 35 citations in 2009. In Google Scholar, the paper has a current total of 129 citations.

"As a researcher, you always hope that your work is making a difference," says Lawn. "And the fact that our work is highly cited suggests that it is of relevance in the context of this terrible epidemic."

The researchers have donated the US\$500 award towards the Hannan Crusaid ART Clinic in Gugulethu where the research work was done.

Morgan.Morris@uct.ac.za



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Green building initiative wins top award

A green building management system designed by a team of third-year students took top honours at the 2010 BSG Information Systems Expo at UCT on 28 October.

The expo is organised annually by the Department of Information Systems to showcase projects by third- and honours-year students.

The winning third-year team of Kate Dawe, Nick Kuilman, Richard Pilkington and David Scheepmaker developed a management system for the Bandwidth Barn, an incubator for entrepreneurs under the umbrella of the Cape IT initiative. Their innovation is a tenant management system that allows building administrators to provide world-class service to their tenants while cutting down on the building's carbon footprint.

The system allows the tenants to liaise directly with the building administration about complaints and maintenance issues, book the communal boardrooms and automate the office rooms to cut down on electric-



Green team: (From left) David Scheepmaker, Nick Kuilman, Kate Dawe and Richard Pilkington.

ity and provide electrical analysis.

Other software innovations on show included a volunteer management system, a refugee employment management system, an educational system for high-school learners,

and an SPCA content management system.

Chief executive officer of BSG Greg Reis said he'd been impressed by the "awesome job" the students had done. **MP**

UCT research in the news in Mail & Guardian



On Friday 5 November the *Mail & Guardian* carried an eight-page UCT research supplement, initiated by the deputy vice-chancellor responsible for research, Professor Danie Visser. Its intention is to market research at UCT to the public, particularly the work that affects society. The campaign also includes news radio advertisements featuring four UCT professors talking about their research fields.

Both the vice-chancellor, Dr Max Price, and Visser wrote op-ed pieces in the supplement (for the full texts, please go to www.uct.ac.za/news/lectures/misc). On the front page, Price wrote about the importance of both applied and pure research to knowledge production and growth in South Africa.

Explaining the tension between applied and ‘blue-sky’ research, Price argued that both are integral to the country’s research endeavour.

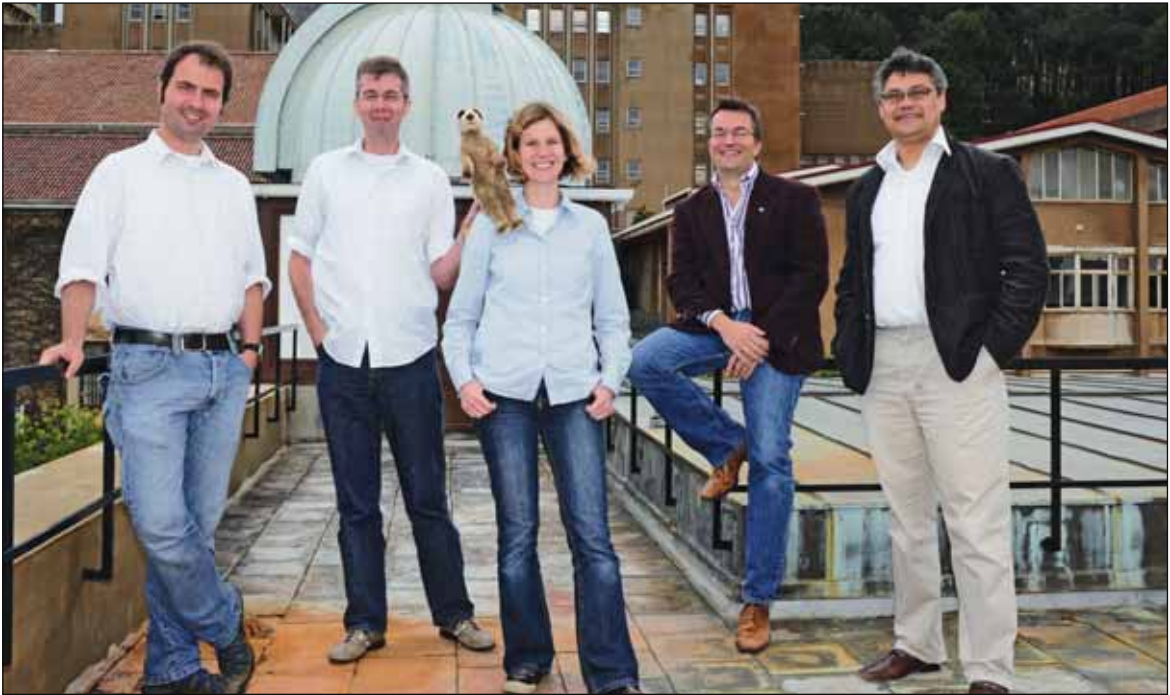
“However, the polarisation is less dichotomous than many assume,” he wrote. “Rather, there is a continuum of research from applied to pure; and very little research can in fact be placed at only one point on this continuum. Many research projects start off on the more curiosity-driven end of the spectrum and evolve into applied work. Others start off trying to address concrete problems such as controlling an infectious disease, and end up having to do basic laboratory work sequencing the genome of a

microbe. “I would estimate that over 90% of research at UCT has direct or indirect relevance to real-world problems (and in most cases, also South African problems). Ideally, our research agenda should be without restriction – because the consequences of today’s research on future discoveries cannot be predicted.”

In turn, Visser explained why it is vital to create space for ideas that change the world, many of these born of research conducted at tertiary institutions.

“Universities are complex institutions that do many different things, but in order to do one of the most important things that they are good at – namely, to renew the world through fresh ideas – the academics that populate them need four things: time; resources; diversity; and freedom...

...academics need the space to think. This means that a modern university, even though it cannot avoid measuring performance, must be sensible. It must allow enough time for people to tackle big projects – the big book, or the research question that takes years to answer. And to do so, it must look at the total academic job and craft it in such a way that it does not crush the delight of discovery, of invention, and of meaningful thought. Only then can we expect our universities to astonish us with their ideas.” **MP**



Gravitas: Dr Benne Holwerda, Prof Erwin de Blok, Dr Sarah Blyth, Prof Patrick Woudt and Dr Kurt van der Heyden.

UCT radio astronomy scores large chunk of MeerKAT observation time

Four UCT Astrophysics, Cosmology and Gravity Research Centre (ACGC) Key Science proposals are among ten successful bids for the 43 000 hours of observing time allocated to radio astronomers from Africa and around the world on South Africa’s MeerKAT telescope.

A precursor telescope to the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), which will be the largest radio telescope in the world (South Africa and Australia are both bidding to host this multi-billion-euro facility), the MeerKAT telescope consists of 64 13.5m diameter Gregorian offset dishes. A MeerKAT engineering test bed of seven dishes (KAT-7) is already complete on the potential SKA site near Carnarvon in the Northern Cape Province. This will contribute to the development of technology required for SKA.

Radio astronomy is the study of celestial objects that emit radio waves. These objects could be galaxies but could also be exploding stars. Radio telescopes like MeerKAT harness these faint signals, allowing astronomers to probe the ‘Dark Ages’ of the Universe, the

time before the birth of the first stars or galaxies

The four UCT proposals, or Key Science projects, were among 21 involving more than 500 radio astronomers around the globe (including 59 astronomers from South Africa) following the invitation from the MeerKAT project issued in October last year. The other winning proposals were from Australia, the UK, India, Germany, and the Netherlands. Projects were reviewed and rated on the basis of their scientific merit, and technical and operational feasibility.

Each proposal has been awarded a substantial tranche of telescope time during the first five years of MeerKAT’s operation (the telescope comes on stream in 2015). Together the UCT projects (led by ACGC scientists) will account for 40% of the observation time allocated.

Drs Sarah Blyth and Benne Holwerda, together with a colleague from the US, will lead the Deep HI Field project, an ultra-deep survey of neutral hydrogen gas in the early Universe. SARChI Chair in Radio Astronomy Professor Erwin de Blok’s Mhongoose study will focus

on deep observations of 30 nearby galaxies (25 times deeper than previous observations). The Mightee project, by Dr Kurt van der Heyden and Matt Jarvis will lead the International GigaHertz Tiered Extragalactic Explorations Survey. In their ThunderKAT project, Professor Patrick Woudt and Professor Rob Fender of the University of Southampton in the UK will lead the hunt for dynamic and explosive radio transients.

The coup underscores UCT’s strength in radio astronomy. Last year, the National Research Foundation awarded R48 million to underpin the establishment at UCT of the Chair in Extragalactic Multi-Wavelength Astronomy in the ACGC.

“Two of the main strengths in the department are radio astronomy and the evolution of neutral hydrogen gas in the Universe,” De Blok adds.

Many of the projects need ‘radio-quiet’ parts of the planet, areas without mobile phones, which De Blok, describes as “the enemy of radio astronomy”. De Blok and PhD student Bradley Frank also played a role in designing the configuration of the MeerKAT telescope. **MP**

Do you need to catch up on a course or get ahead?

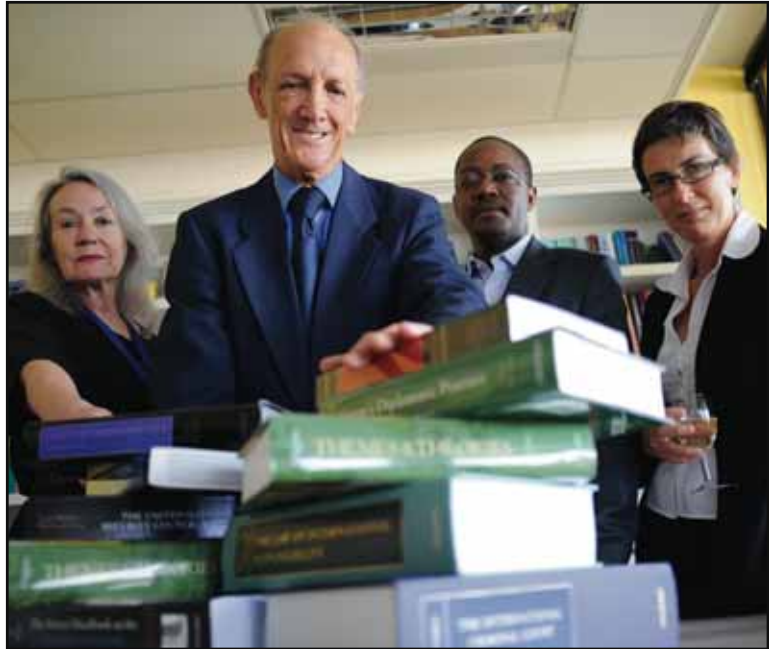
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Berman bears book bounty

A 40-year veteran of international law and diplomacy, as well as a UCT graduate and visiting professor, Sir Frank Berman is a big fan of, the faculty of law’s introductory course in international law, compulsory for first-year students. Keen to back up what’s taught in the lecture theatres, Berman, on a recent visit from the UK, donated a dozen or so recently published books on the subject to the faculty’s Brand van Zyl Law Library. The volumes cover everything from the laws of international responsibility and diplomatic law to the workings of the International Criminal Court. “These books are essential additions to the library,” said Associate Professor Danwood Chirwa, head of the Department of Public Law, at the handover of the titles on 29 October. “Books,” noted Berman, “have a way of multiplying the benefits of the gifts over many generations of students.” **MP**



Berman’s books: Sir Frank Berman (second from left) made a gift of books to the Law Library. In picture with him are (from left) law librarian Pamela Snyman, Assoc Prof Danwood Chirwa and faculty dean Prof PJ Schwikkard.

Use secure websites for safer online shopping

Online shopping may be your fastest and easiest way of getting what you want, when you want it. But, if you're not using a secure website when you type in your personal information, including your banking details, then you're at risk of becoming a victim of online theft, writes Steff Hughes of ICTS.

Sarah forgot her husband's birthday and has just found something for him on a website that offers online orders and same-day-delivery. All she needs to do is register with her name, telephone number, physical address and credit card details before 12h00. She decides to submit the requested information, hoping to have the gift delivered later that afternoon.

What Sarah doesn't realise is that she has just sent all her personal information via a non-secure website, and a cybercriminal can now make purchases using her credit card. If Sarah had known how to spot a se-

cure website, she could have avoided becoming a victim of online theft. Secure websites use authentication, encryption codes and third-party verification to protect your personal information from being stolen when you send it via the Internet.

Here are five things that Sarah could have checked to see if she was on a secure website:

1. Does the URL of the website start with "https"? Most of the websites you visit will start with "http", which is okay if you're doing general browsing. But if you want to order and pay for something via the Internet, you need to make sure that the URL starts with "https" so that you are know that you're using a secure website.

2. Is there a closed padlock icon in the browser window? Some fraudulent websites imitate this padlock by inserting a fake icon. To check if a padlock icon is real and

that you are on a secure website, click the padlock to view details of the website's security certificate.

3. Is there a security certificate or trust seal on the website? You should be able to obtain detailed information about the security level of a website by clicking on its site seal or by hovering over it with your mouse. These seals are supplied by certifying authorities such as Verisign, GeoTrust, SSL.com or Thawte. If there is no contact information for a certifying authority on a website, then the security certificate is probably not legitimate and the website is not secure.

4. Firefox 3.6 and Internet Explorer 8 have nifty tools to show you if a website has a valid security certificate or trust seal or not - especially when you don't see one on the website. In Internet Explorer 8 go to the Command Bar, click Safety and then Security Report. In Firefox 3.6,



click the Site Identity button located to the left of the URL in the Location bar. If the Site Identity button is grey, then no site information is available from that website; if it is blue, then basic information is provided; and if the Site identity button is green, then full site information is available.

5. Is the latest Internet browser version installed on the computer? Built-in security checks and updated

protection features will protect you against online theft tactics. The new browser will also detect if a website's security certificate has expired or the certifying authority is not recognised, and show you a security warning recommending that you don't open the website.

Remember to check that you are on a secure website before you submit any of your personal information to make for a safer online experience. **MP**

Kick-starting mediation at UCT

UCT has taken four important steps towards institutionalising mediation as a means of resolving disputes at the university.

In late 2009 Senate and Council approved a policy on mediation (this can be found on the UCT website at <http://www.uct.ac.za/about/policies>), which set up the institutional framework to promote mediation as a normative way of resolving disputes. The champion of mediation was envisaged to be the university Ombud.

The second event was the appointment (at the beginning of September) of Glenda Wildschut to the position of director of Transformation Services, a position that co-ordinates transformation activities, including events of an educational and mediatory nature. This appointment consolidates the link between mediation and transformation.

The third event is the appointment from 2011 of Zetu Makamandela-Mguqulwa as the UCT Ombud, a designated neutral or impartial dispute-resolution practitioner whose

major function is to provide confidential and informal assistance to members of the university community – both students and staff.

The fourth event was the training of 26 mediators drawn from the UCT staff, conducted by Professor Barney Jordaan of the Africa Centre for Dispute Settlement earlier this year. UCT now has an in-house resource of mediators in most faculties and divisions who can be called on for the implementation of the mediation policy.

The challenge now is to raise consciousness about the availability of and support for mediation. There is much confusion about mediation, and many still see it as a judgment-making process like arbitration. Mediation is an agreed process, entered into voluntarily, in which independent mediators assist participants who are in dispute to reach a settlement of that dispute. Mediation is a separate process from the grievance procedure, and aims to move away from adversarial procedures and resolve issues as early as possible. **MP**

Programme ensures new academics are linked in

Vice-chancellor Dr Max Price and his senior management have reason to be pleased about this year's cohort on the New Academic Practitioners Programme (NAPP); they are a diverse group and represent UCT's vision for the future.

In fact, the programme has made an immeasurable contribution to integration, and should be made compulsory, one senior leader suggested at a cocktail party Price hosted to celebrate the graduation of this year's group on 27 October.

Now in its seventh year, NAPP is a year-long orientation programme run by the Centre for Higher Education Development for newly appointed academics, with particular emphasis on teaching and research development. Over 200 staff members have graduated from the programme since its inception.

Despite this, it is not widely



Networked: The Faculty of Health Sciences had the biggest group among this year's NAPP graduates; some, seen here flanked by VC Dr Max Price (left), and deputy dean Prof Gonda Perez (right), are Hein Lamprecht, Virginia Zweigenthal, Rachel Weiss, Collet Dandara, Busayo Ige, Clare Davis, Hilary Barlow, Roisin Kelly, and Vukani Madikane.

known on campus, and Price appealed to participants to spread the message.

"It is your job to go back to your departments and educate others about NAPP, and encourage your managers to send new staff members," he said.

Price advised participants to maintain the links they have established through the programme, and called on them to take advantage of other networking opportunities available at UCT. **MP**

Mall mulls over magical mucus

Slippery and sticky, but sweet and satisfying...

With such a description, it's obvious that Professor Anwar Mall is passionate about his subject – a passion he shared in his inaugural lecture, *The Marvel of Mucus: Slippery, sticky substance so essential to life*, on 20 October.

Mall's career-spanning interest began with a chance visit to UCT, when he met the then-head of medical biochemistry, Emeritus Professor Wieland Gevers.

"It was an unplanned visit to the medical school during a holiday in the '70s and a chance meeting with Prof Gevers, a rare combination of a gifted mind and a caring human being, which changed the course of my life."

This field of research was largely unexplored when Mall completed his master's thesis, titled *Physical and Chemical Changes in Porcine Gastric Mucus in the Normal and Ulcerated States*, under the mentorship of Gevers and Professor Rosemary Hickman.

"Prof Hickman, one of the most selfless human beings I have met; was kind, welcoming and patient, knowing all too well the difficulties of working



Spit and polish: Professor Anwar Mall's inaugural lecture extolled the essential value of mucus.

with mucus, a very new research field in South Africa."

Mall remembers that while researching his PhD at the University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in the UK, there were no more than 25 mucus researchers in the world. Here, Mall completed his thesis, *Gastro-duodenal Mucus Isolation and Structure*, in the laboratory of Professor Adrian Allen, who formulated the first model of the mucin structure. This is the substance that gives mucus its slippery and sticky (and, to some, its sweet and satisfying) texture.

Mucin, a glycoprotein which

comprises a mere one percent of mucus, is its strength, explains Mall. It's the magical ingredient that lends mucus the power to prevent your stomach from digesting itself.

"The hydrochloric acid that digests our food in our stomachs is so strong that it could burn a hole through your hand," says Mall. "But a constant coating of mucus on your stomach walls keeps the organ safe from its contents."

It's far more complex than that, of course. The mucus layer is thicker in some parts of the stomach to provide lubrication where needed, and it also works with dead cells to form a healing 'scab' over damaged tissue. In a sense, mucus is the body's Jack-of-all-trades, also protecting and lubricating many other organs such as the cervix and lungs.

Mall's enthusiasm extends to his teaching, where he is driven to inspire a sense of wonder in his students for everything around and within them.

"We are made up of atoms to form a consciousness – so how can we not be filled with wonder and awe at this life and existence?"

Chris.McEvoy@uct.ac.za

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How the botanical David took over the world from the Goliaths

Today, flowering plants rule the world. A new paper suggests that a hundred or so million years ago, it was fire that first gave these weedy plants the upper hand over their taller counterparts.

Documentarians, artists and moviemakers like to portray the Cretaceous period, described as the heyday of dinosaurs, as a veritable Garden of Eden – a swampy landmass teeming with lush, tropical forests.

(Do a Google image search for ‘Cretaceous’, and see.)

But this may be far from the truth, suggests a bold new paper, *Fire and the Spread of Flowering Plants in the Cretaceous*, by Professor William Bond of UCT’s Department of Botany and Professor Andrew Scott of the Department of Earth Sciences, Royal Holloway at the University of London in the UK. Rather, the authors say in the paper that has appeared in the journal *New Phytologist*, conditions in the Cretaceous – 120 to 65 million years ago – were such that wildfires and the ham-footed behemoths that ruled the world would have been the dominant forces shaping the landscape.

They’ve tabled a catalogue of conditions that would have predisposed the Cretaceous to plenty of fires. There were high temperatures, a seasonally dry climate, high levels of oxygen (making up of 25% of the atmosphere, compared to the 21% of today) and, as a result, a greater likelihood of lightning-sparked fires. Further proof that fires were common during the

Cretaceous is the many samples of charcoaled flower fossils, dating back to that period, that have been found.

So instead of a world overrun by dense forests with high trees and vines, the ecosystem would more than likely have been typified by open, shrubby vegetation, akin to the fynbos or savanna of today. If you think about it, says Bond, if this was indeed the golden age of dinosaurs as well, it doesn’t hold that these bulky and clunky creatures would have been able to negotiate their way through thick forests. A flat, scrubby terrain would have been more likely.

“If we’re right, then it was a very different world from the one we thought it was,” says Bond.

This would also answer another puzzle. How it came to be that flowering plants, ‘weeds’ that first appeared around 135 million years ago, would have overrun the ruling conifer-like trees known as gymnosperms.

In their paper, Bond and Scott argue that the fiery conditions would have made a fertile breeding ground for smaller flowering plants, aka angiosperms. For one thing, angiosperms thrive in open, sunlit habitats, typical after a fire. And “frequent surface fires also favour low-stature plants that can recover quickly after a burn”, they write.

Angiosperms also had many new adaptations counting in their favour – they were highly productive, thanks in large part to a highly efficient conducting system for delivering water to the



Fiery flowers: In a new paper, Prof William Bond and a UK colleague argue that fires and dinosaurs can explain how flowering plants came to be prolific.

leaves, and were able to regenerate swiftly after a fire (compared to the slow-sprouting conifers).

So while the tall and tardy gymnosperms struggled to recover after fires, angiosperms would quickly resprout and colonise areas once dominated by the gymnosperms. The more fires – and the shrubby angiosperms would probably have sparked additional rounds of fire – the wider the an-

giosperms would have spread.

Bond expects some comeback from the article. For example, nearly all the evidence for the fire hypothesis hails from the Northern Hemisphere, so there are question marks around extrapolating these to conditions in the Southern Hemisphere.

But Bond is confident the paper’s claims can be backed up by his own studies on the roles of fire and large

mammals on the environment, even though his work concentrates on contemporary times and contemporary animals such as elephants.

“Fires and big mammals can really help shape the world,” he says. “But when they go extinct, people forget about them.”

The new paper, however, may be a timely reminder.

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Recovery drink is novel pay-off for sports scientist

Even in the productive health sciences, years of toil in a lab very rarely make it into a commercial product. Now UCT’s Associate Professor Andrew Bosch has become one of the few to see that happen, thanks to a new protein-based muscle-recovery product known as PeptoSport.

The drink – it comes in powder form and must be mixed with water – spills out of Bosch’s work with athletes, elite and otherwise, at the UCT/ Medical Research Council Research Unit for Exercise Science and Sports Medicine (ESSM), and an enduring research interest in the roles of carbohydrates and protein in sports performance. Not one to merely scratch the surface, Bosch has spent years delving into the physiology and biochemistry that underpin those relationships.

His labour has now been applied to PeptoSport, a muscle-recovery drink manufactured by DSM Nutritional Products South Africa as part of its Pepto range. That two-syllabled brand prefix also hints at the x-factor ingredient in the drink.

Other than having to strike a careful balance between the respective amounts of carbs and protein in the drink, Bosch also included a particular type of protein known as protein hydrolysate in his formulation. His cocktail was specifically developed for a research project investigating muscle recovery from hard training.

Protein hydrolysate – or PeptoPro, as the DSM-trademarked



Drink up: Assoc Prof Andrew Bosch and PeptoSport, a sports drink that he developed through his work at UCT.

ingredient is known – is a protein that has been broken down into strings of amino acids (protein’s building blocks) in a process known as hydrolysis. These bonded amino acids are also known as peptides. (Peptides, Pepto – get it?)

Other studies have shown that protein hydrolysates, unlike intact proteins normally found in food, require no digestion and so are absorbed directly into the blood.

That is one of the reasons they may

outperform more complex proteins in enhancing the muscle recovery process, explains Bosch.

But the literature has as yet not shown conclusively that protein hydrolysate improves sports performance. Especially among elite athletes who, trained to the hilt, have very little margin for improvement.

“So it’s quite a big ask to get anything else to have a further positive effect,” says Bosch.

He was fortunate enough, how-

ever, to be able to put his protein mixture through a litmus test. In early 2009 he and his team ran a study with the Springbok Rugby Sevens, who had volunteered their services and bodies to the ESSM, at a training camp in Stellenbosch.

Using muscle soreness and fatigue as a marker for recovery – the players had to complete elaborate questionnaires – Bosch was able to show that, yes, even among such fine-fettled athletes, protein hydrolysates

did improve post-training recovery, particularly in the quadriceps and calf muscles.

Bosch had acquired his peptides from DSM, a global producer of PeptoPro. Following his good results with the Springbok Sevens, DSM was keen to join forces with UCT to produce and market the drink, and the two groups recently signed a licensing agreement.

UCT’s Research Contracts and IP Services (RCIPS) licensed the formulation developed by Bosch to DSM on an exclusive basis for commercial use. PeptoSport’s market success will earn royalty revenue for UCT, and will be used to reward the inventor and fund further research at ESSM, says Dr Andrew Bailey, intellectual property manager at RCIPS.

“We’re having such great results with this product among top athletes and teams,” says Heidi-Lee Robertson, new-business development manager with DSM.

Good news for athletes, reports Robertson, is that PeptoSport has been registered with Informed Sport, a screening programme of the UK-based HFL Sport Science laboratories that checks for the presence of banned substances in sports supplements.

For Bosch, the drink is an out-of-the-ordinary return on his work.

“Most of the time,” he says, “the research ends up as a paper in a journal, so actually seeing a product on a shelf is kind of novel.”

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Patents office will mother your invention

If you're thinking of becoming an inventor and are looking for guidance, the most logical advice you could receive is don't do it – or at least, don't give up the day job. Statistics show that only one in 10 000 patents filed are successful to the point of reclaiming their investment – and it's a costly process.

UCT's Research Contracts & Intellectual Property Services (RCIPS) is a protective buffer standing between the inexorable inventor and the wild world of pending patents and property rights. RCIPS evaluates all inventors' disclosures for commercial merit, protects intellectual property and (in collaboration with inventors) licences and markets the innovation.

The department has recently released three publications: *Innovation at UCT 2010* is an overview of the

university's record in this branch of research; the *UCT Laboratory Notebook for researchers*, which is compliant with the requirements for proof of inventorship and intellectual property rights; and the *Inventor's Guide*, which details the step-by-step process inventors must follow in filing a patent.

To recognise UCT's innovators, the RCIPS held an Innovation Evening on 2 November, an event which also served as the launch for the three new publications.

"We need to acknowledge our inventors' output," explains RCIPS director, Piet Barnard. "It's mostly a lot of work for very little reward."

Averaging 30 new patents per year (mostly from the health sciences, engineering and science faculties), UCT's research enterprise is active and healthy, says Barnard. The value

of contracts approved by the office has risen sharply, from R337 million in 2006 to R543 million in 2009.

UCT's top inventor is the prolific Professor Ed Rybicki of the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology. A leading virologist and an international authority on creating vaccine candidates, including trial vaccines for HIV, Rybicki has 44 granted patents under his belt, some of which are starting to bear fruit. The commercialisation of his intellectual property has resulted in significant royalties.

Rybicki advises new inventors to prepare themselves for a serious learning curve.

"Don't divulge things willy-nilly," Rybicki cautions. "Rather talk to RCIPS about whether something is protectable."

Chris.McEvoy@uct.ac.za



Learning Curve: Prof Ed Rybicki has 44 granted patents.

Selfless student leaders honoured



Outstanding leadership: DVC Prof Thandabantu Nhlapo presents the Vice-Chancellor's Student Leader Award to 2009/2010 SRC president Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh.

Because of his abundant achievements, almost everyone foretold that 2009/2010 Students' Representative Council president Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh would walk away with this year's coveted Vice-Chancellor's Student Leader Award.

And when the announcement was made at UCT's annual Student Leadership Awards on 21 October, Mpofu-Walsh – who also scooped the Kerry Capstick-Dale Student Leader Award, along with Dylan van Vuuren of Rainbow UCT – received a deserved standing ovation.

Described as an "inclusive, principled, team-oriented and inspirational leader", Mpofu-Walsh is a member of UCT Council, the Senate, the South African Union of Students'

Extended Executive Committee, the Board of the South African Peace Alliance, and the One Young World Africa Initiative. He also brainstormed and helped organise the successful inaugural African Student Leaders Summit, which was hosted by UCT in September.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Student Affairs Student Leader Award went to Allison Powell and Shannon Bernhardt; and the Executive Director: Department of Student Affairs Student Leader Award was shared by Sumaya Hendricks and Erik de Ridder.

The following awards were also presented on the night:

Most Outstanding Student Leader in an Undergraduate Student Faculty

Council Award: Lungelo Gumedede.

Most Outstanding Student Leader in a Postgraduate Student Faculty Council Award: Faith Chirinda.

Most Outstanding Student Leader in Sport: Xhanti Lomzi Nesi.

Most Outstanding Student Leader in Community Service Award: Simon Mendelsohn.

Most Outstanding Student Leader in a Residence Award: Kumbirai Gundani.

Most Outstanding Student Leader in Media Award: Remy Ngamije.

Most Outstanding Student Leader in a Society or Student Organisation Award: Richard Parker.

The Ackerman Foundation Student Leader Award: Amanda Ngwenya and Tapiwa Tevera.

UCT Student Team of the Year: Ubunye.

Deputy vice-chancellor Professor Crain Soudien noted that he was moved by the total sense of giving that UCT students – many of whom were not among the award winners – are demonstrating. As a public university, Soudien added, it is important for UCT to have confidence that it is sending quality individuals into the world.

"We like to think that we produce students with a healthy sense of proportion, a healthy sense of self-regard," he said.

Turning to the winners, Soudien said they represent "selflessness", in which self-gratitude counts as the least important attribute. **MP**

Social justice inspires students

In words and in action, students expressed how the *UCT Global Citizenship: Leading for Social Justice* programme has broadened their knowledge and inspired them to address global issues.

At a function to mark the completion of the pilot phase of the programme on 18 October, students celebrated in words and song.

The programme is run by the Centre for Higher Education Development, and provides students with an opportunity to engage with current issues and debates on global citizen-



Global minded: Student Isabelle Giddy presents at a ceremony to celebrate the *UCT Global Citizenship: Leading for Social Justice* programme.

ship, leadership and social justice, and to reflect on community service experiences. The programme stems from the university's commitment to enhance graduate attributes by encouraging them to think critically about problems facing the country, the continent and the world, and to respond accordingly.

Over 100 students – more than double the number initially envisaged – took up the programme, which was a combination of online and group work.

Students Vukile Ntozakhe and

Tebogo Photoane said the programme has enhanced their understanding of the world, and of the role they can play in improving things.

"There is so much that we can do for the less fortunate in our spare time," Ntozakhe said.

Deputy vice-chancellor Professor Crain Soudien said he was pleased at the impact the programme has had on students, and at the enthusiasm students have shown towards addressing global problems. The outcomes of the pilot programme will be considered in planning for next year. **MP**

Green awards for environmental champions

Environmental campaigns tend to focus on awareness and action and ignore a series of internal stages where change towards sustainability can be blocked, according to environmental sustainability consultant Dr Sandra Rippon.

At the 2010 Green Campus Initiative (GCI) Backsberg Sustainability Awards in October, Rippon said change does not happen at once but in stages. In these stages – pre-contemplation, contemplation, planning, action and maintenance – sometimes people do not know what to do, are ambivalent and complacent, and can easily be discouraged.

To deal with possible hurdles,

Rippon suggested that the GCI should find tools for creating forums in which people can talk.

"You must create a listening space for people to express their hopes and concerns, and that will cultivate the motivation needed to work through ambivalence and resistance," Rippon said.

The awards, given for the first time since GCI's inception three years ago, are an important part of the change cycle, and celebrate the maintenance stage of the university sustainability campaign, Rippon added.

Outgoing GCI chairperson Johanna Kallen noted that the awards



Winning team: Richard Parker of the GCI (left) and Riyaad Omer of Eskom (right) flank Michael Cole and Phillip Von Platen of College House at the GCI Backsberg Sustainability Awards.

are aimed at recognising the "great work" done by staff and students to make UCT more sustainable. The GCI hopes that the awards will inspire future actions, added Kallen.

At the event, College House was awarded the Eskom Energy Challenge prize for residences, the Professional Communication Unit received the Backsberg Group Sustainability Award, Dr Richard Hill of the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science was honoured with the Backsberg Staff Sustainability Award, and 2009/2010 Students' Representative Council member Erik de Ridder received the Backsberg Student Sustainability Award. **MP**

EVENTS

Steven Robbins, Urban social movements, rights talk and mass action in Cape Town, Department of Sociology, University of Stellenbosch. Date: November 3. Time: 3pm. Venue: Davies Reading Room 2.27 Engeo Building, Upper Campus

GSB Research Seminar
Environmental Governance Without the State – Can It Work?”. Speakers Tanja A. Borzel & Thomas Risse (Freie Universitat Berlin). Date: Fri 5 Nov, 13h00-14h30. Venue: Faculty Room, GSB, Breakwater Campus, Portswood Rd, Green Point. Contact: tamlyn.mawa@gsb.uct.ac.za

Department of Medicine Thursday Forum Professor Keertan Dheda - “Ordering one of the 5 new diagnostic tests for TB: how, why and when? Date: 04 November 2010. Contact: liziwe.figlan@uct.ac.za. Title: - Prof Andrzej Okreglicki - ECG QUIZ. Date: 11 November 2010. Contact: liziwe.figlan@uct.ac.za

VACANT POSTS

EXECUTIVE AND ACADEMIC POSTS:

Lecturer/Senior Lecturer: Mathematics, Academic Development Programme, Centre of Higher Education Development, Closing date: 15 November 2010

Lecturer/Senior Lecturer: Physics, Academic Development Programme, Centre of Higher Education Development, Closing date: 15 November 2010

Lecturer/Senior Lecturer/ Associate Professor: Thermodynamics/Fluid Mechanics, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering & The Built Environment, Closing date: 19 November 2010

Lecturer, Department of Mathematics & Applied Mathematics, Faculty of Science, Closing date: 22 November 2010

Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer, African Gender Institute, Faculty of Humanities, Closing date: 26 November 2010

Lecturer/Senior Lecturer, Department of Mathematics & Applied Mathematics, Faculty of Science, Closing date: 14 January 2011

Executive Director: University Libraries, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, Closing date: 28 February 2011

RESEARCH, PROFESSIONAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT POSTS (PASS)

Health Sciences Faculty IT Manager, Faculty of Health Sciences, Closing date: 08 November 2010

Small Group Facilitators, School of Public Health & Family Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, Closing date: 08 November 2010

Finance Officer, Properties & Services Department, Closing date: 10 November 2010

Administrative Officer, School of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Closing date: 11 November 2010

Binding Assistant, UCT Libraries Bindery, Closing date: 12 November 2010

IT Liaison Officer, School of Architecture, Planning & Geomatics, Faculty of Engineering & The Built Environment, Closing date: 12 November 2010

Research Assistant, Department of Chemical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering & The Built Environment, Closing date: 12 November 2010

Administrative Officer, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, Closing date: 12 November 2010

Data Administrator, SATVI, IIDMM, Faculty of Health Sciences, Closing date: 18 November 2010

Data Monitor, SATVI, IIDMM, Faculty of Health Sciences, Closing date: 18 November 2010

Senior Secretary, Department of Psychiatry & Mental Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Closing date: 19 November 2010

Senior Technical Officer, Department of Electrical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering & The Built Environment, Closing date: 19 November 2010

Communication & Media Manager, Communication & Marketing Department, Closing date: 21 November 2010

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Part-Time Project Co-ordinator, School of Public Health & Family Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, Closing date: 30 November 2010

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On the button: UCT fencer Yasmin Hankel with Douglas McClure, chairperson of Fencing Western Province.

UCT fencers are clear-cut winners

The UCT Fencing Club's cup spilled over at the annual Fencing Western Province Awards, held on 16 October at the Italian Club in Milnerton.

Both UCT fencing coaches, Len Davids and Glenda Pieters, were honoured with Lifetime Achievement Awards. Davids was the first black sportsperson to be awarded national colours, joining the South African Amateur Fencing Association (SAAFA) team for a tour of Europe and Israel in 1977; while in 1976, Pieters (as Glenda Benjamin) became the first black fencer to win a national title.

"Fencing for me is my life and

my passion," says Pieters. "And it's a pleasure for me to be coaching young fencers."

Also at the WP awards function, Jacques Viljoen and Yasmin Hankel, both UCT fine-arts students, were named Sportsman and Sports-woman of the Year respectively. Finally, Hankel and Michael Malahe received trophies honouring them as the province's ranking champions for 2010 in their respective categories: Hankel in the senior women's foil, and Malahe in the senior men's épée.

Viljoen is also the top-ranked fencer in senior men's foil.

Morgan.Morris@uct.ac.za

Best of the best hailed at sports awards

Unlike in previous years, in which one or two sports clubs hogged the limelight and the awards, this year's UCT Sports Awards (held on Saturday 23 October) boasted a more equitable spread of accolades.

Here's a rundown of the winners of the main categories:

Club of the Year – the Rowing Club, for overall good governance, sound financial management, value for money for its members, its social responsiveness initiatives, performance achievements and new initiatives.

Sports Award for Transformation – the Mountain & Ski Club, for a project in which it takes 20 grade-10 learners on outdoor excursions throughout the year; in 2010 the club also introduced a grade-11 group, specifically the 'graduated' grade-10 group of 2009.

The Turpin Cup for excellence and dedicated service to UCT – Brendon Gliddon, who's been involved with rowing for over 12 years, seven of these at UCT. Gliddon has coached the SACS eight to two back-to-back wins at the South African Schools Championships, has coached the UCT men's first eight for three years, and has been club president for two. He was instrumental in setting up the club's development programme, and has just been elected president of University Sports South Africa Rowing.

Sports Award for Best First-Year Student – Amy Freakes, who was selected for the Western Province A senior hockey team, and earned a South Africa under-18 cap.

The Landstem Trophy for Performance of the Year (single performance) – Nicolaas Louw, who represented South Africa at the Commonwealth Judo Championships in Singapore in January, finishing third in the men's individual event. That made him South Africa's number-one-ranked competitor in the under-73kg weight class.

The Butterworth Trophy for Team of the Year – the chess and men's hockey clubs shared the honours. The



Winning woman: Water polo international Laura Barrett was named UCT Sportsperson of the Year.



Brendon Gliddon (right) won the Turpin Cup. He was photographed with John Donald, manager of Sport and Recreation.

Chess Club won the fiercely-fought Western Province Premier League, the club's first championship victory since 1992; while the men's hockey first team won the Western Province Grand Challenge for the first time since 2004, losing only one of their 16 matches.

The Jamison Cup for Sport-

sperson of the Year – Laura Barrett, captain of the UCT water polo team that won the WP winter and summer leagues. Barrett also led the Western Province A team to victory at the Currie Cup Nationals, and represented South Africa at the World League Championships in France and Greece.

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