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UCT's renamed College of Accounting puts transformation, public sector high on agenda

The Department of Accounting at the University of Cape Town has changed its name to reflect a fresh focus on transformation within the accounting profession, improving the quality of its graduates, and playing a more active role in improving public sector accounting, among other things.

In January 2012, the department was renamed the College of Accounting. Professor Mark Graham, founding head of the college, said the change is part of a plan to improve both the quantity and quality of accounting professionals coming through the system, such as chartered accountants, auditors, financial managers and tax experts, and more importantly to help transform the profession.

Professor Graham said: "The college will have a far more explicit professional orientation than its predecessor, and this will be embodied in its vision, mission and in the performance evaluation of its academics."

While the undergraduate programmes will remain largely the same, the college will explore different ways to improve throughput, especially that of black students. So it may, for example, look at language issues in the teaching of subjects.

"We need to understand how to better the teaching of students whose first language is not English," said Professor Graham.

The college also intends to play a more active role in the public sector, where accounting has been found to be "a little weak", according to Professor Graham. He said: "Academics will be expected to provide high-level consultation to the state and professional bodies, and to be involved in the education of those who have responsibility for service delivery, among other things. We want to focus on what we do well, and it is important to get the economy of the country sorted."

The college works with the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants to assist Walter Sisulu University and the University of Zululand - two of the most disadvantaged institutions in the country - ramp up their programmes.

UCT students excelled in the 2012 SAICA Part I Board Exam, whose results were released in March. The UCT pass rate for first time writers was 92% (national average 78%) and the UCT pass rate for all candidates was 88% (national average 64%). Professor Graham noted that "although these pass rates (both UCT and national) are slightly down on those of the previous year, UCT had the highest absolute number of passes in the exam of all the universities in South Africa, other than UNISA."

He added: "Another pleasing aspect of the results was the success of our first-time African, Coloured and Indian students in the exam. UCT's pass rate for African students was 90% (national average 71%), for Coloured students was 84% (national average 71%) and for Indian students was 87% (national average 69%). Altogether 131 African, Coloured and Indian first-time students from UCT passed the exam. This cohort comprises 52% of successful UCT students, compared with 48% in 2011."

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