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UCT, Brown collaborate to train new cadre of HIV social scientists

R18.6m project to bring interdisciplinary aspect to HIV response

The University of Cape Town has teamed up with Brown University in the USA to develop a new cadre of HIV social scientists who can provide sustainable, interdisciplinary solutions to HIV/AIDS in South Africa, where one in six adults is HIV positive.

The project, "Partnership for the Next Generation of HIV Social Science in South Africa", will see social sciences play a greater role in responding to HIV.

Leading the UCT effort is Dr Christopher Colvin, an anthropologist working in the Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Research (CIDER) at UCT's School of Public Health and Family Medicine. He is a senior research officer in social sciences as well as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections. He is also the Head of the new Division of Social and Behavioural Sciences in the school.

The project will be run at the public health schools of both UCT and Brown University, and will be funded by the National Institutes of Health in the USA to the value of US\$1.9 million (R18.6 million) over five years.

Dr Colvin says social science and public health responses to HIV are both extremely important. "Many at UCT are at the forefront of this research." Dr Colvin's work integrates social science perspectives into public health research on HIV/AIDS, gender, community health workers and health activism. He says responses to these issues in the health sciences and social sciences have often developed in parallel, rather than in close collaboration. "This grant aims to integrate the social sciences into the core of our public health teaching and research on HIV."

The partnership between UCT and Brown will contribute to curricular development, training and professional development within the division and the school at UCT, through collaborations with HIV-focused social and behavioural scientists at Brown. Outside of the classroom, it will create opportunities for collaborative, interdisciplinary and innovative research in HIV social science, particularly at postgraduate and postdoctoral levels.

Dr Colvin says the collaboration “will enhance the research environment for HIV social science by fostering excellence in interdisciplinary HIV social science research, and by expanding collaborative and innovative research opportunities”.

ENDS

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