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20 weeks, 1 challenge, 1000s of upstarts - a whole new university experience

An innovative platform for emerging entrepreneurs, UCT Upstarts, was launched at the University of Cape Town this week. UCT Upstarts is the Vice-Chancellor's Social Innovation Challenge and a joint initiative between the UCT Graduate School of Business's Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Super Stage, a social innovation platform for students.

Fuelled by the energy of South Africa's born-frees, Dr Max Price, Vice-Chancellor of UCT, with Dr Francois Bonnici, Founding Director of the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Gina Levy, social entrepreneur and Founder of Super Stage, crafted a joint vision to help position UCT as Africa's social innovation capital. Through this collaboration UCT Upstarts was born.

Dr Price said: "The idea behind UCT Upstarts is to promote a different student culture at UCT – one that encourages an innovation mindset that solves real-world problems from campus; a mindset that is orientated to creating jobs for oneself and others, not just finding a job; and the skills to launch start-up ventures."

Dr Bonnici added: "UCT Upstarts speaks directly to our desire to inspire and challenge individuals, organisations and systems to question what is, reimagine what can be, and to get behind and deliver those solutions that have the potential to transform the world we live in. Transformative change requires us to breakdown paradigms, draw on different skillsets and work across disciplines; hence we're encouraging multi-disciplinary teams to create new solutions together."

A 24/7 outdoor pop-up hub – made out of yellow crates (sponsored by MPACT PC) - has been erected next to the Jameson Steps on Upper Campus for the next four weeks and will be followed by an indoor pop-up hub, appropriately called "The Change Room". These will become "epicentres of innovation".

Students have 20 weeks to solve the Vice-Chancellor's Social Innovation Challenge, "Imagine a New Africa". Every Monday ("Mind-blowing Mondays"), Wednesday ("Workshop Wednesdays") and Friday ("Fun Fridays") during lunchtime they will experience inspiring, imaginative and interactive pop-up classes, workshops and activations as part of a curated "Pop-up Social Innovation Curriculum".

A "Pro-Circuit" of social innovators and coaches will share stories, demonstrate the impact of their own solutions and guide multi-disciplinary student teams to develop their own breakthrough solutions to the 2015 Vice-Chancellor's Social Innovation Challenge.

In September, each team will exhibit their ideas at a Campus Expo and then post them to Thundafund.com (a crowd-funding platform). Teams that create the most compelling, innovative and socially impactful ideas will be shortlisted and interviewed in the run-up to the "Idea Auction".

This will be a live bidding platform where movers-and-shakers will bid coaching time; resources; equity; internships; networks; a year's incubation at the Solution Space (at the UCT GSB); travel opportunities to some of the most innovative companies in the world; guaranteed entry into the Regional Round of the Global Social Venture Competition in London, United Kingdom; media exposure and "moola" to help launch UCT students' revolutionary start-up ideas into action.

Ms Levy said: "UCT Upstarts is igniting a 'Start-up Student Nation' by mobilising a movement of innovation activists, creating an innovation culture that makes South Africa work better, and driving an innovation economy that creates jobs - starting from our campus. UCT Upstarts aims to put more South African role models on the map – watch this space."

Sponsors and partners include: The Bertha Foundation, Mr Price, Google (Technology Innovation Sponsor), Red Bull Amaphiko and more.

END

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