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New UCT English Language Centre to benefit local and international students

The University of Cape Town launched a new English Language Centre (ELC) within the vibrant Faculty of Humanities yesterday, Wednesday, 18 May 2016. The ELC aims to position Cape Town more favourably as a top destination for English language learning, to take advantage of the booming global English language learning market and to provide specialised language tuition to South African university applicants.

The centre offers first-rate English language tuition, while also providing a comprehensive international student package that includes accommodation and visa assistance. It opened its doors to the first cohort of students on 16 November 2015.

Simon Harrison, principal and chief architect of the school, says one of its chief goals is to aid students in being more successful in their studies and more employable on the global market.

The worldwide language learning market (all languages combined) generated a hefty \$58.2 billion in 2011. When combined with revenues from language services such as localisation, interpretation, and translation, this figure jumps to \$82.6 billion. "English is a key requirement in today's global working world," says Harrison. "Some view English as a gateway into the best colleges or universities. For others, it is simply about acquiring a new set of language skills and exploring a different culture.

Harrison says: "Whatever their motivation, Cape Town offers a perfect location to study English and as Africa's top university, UCT is excellently positioned to deliver a quality learning experience to global students."

ELC programmes are already proving popular amongst European and African students. Following five months (equating to 340 student weeks), there are further bookings for an additional 1200 student weeks, stretching into 2018. So far, the highest proportion of students has come from Germany, followed by Saudi Arabia, Italy and East Africa. The first Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course will commence this June and the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) – for access courses as well as the general EAP courses – will run during the second half of 2016.

“There are currently around 25 language schools [in Cape Town] operating in this space,” says Harrison. “But what differentiates the ELC is that firstly, it is underpinned by the UCT quality benchmark; secondly, students will be immersed in a multicultural university community that will expose them to an unrivalled mix of social, academic and tourist activities; and lastly, students will benefit from the university’s established support systems,” says Harrison.

The number of international students in South Africa is on the rise. The most recent edition of Study South Africa, an annual publication of the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA), revealed that the number of international students had “grown dramatically”, from 12,600 in 1994 to 72,875 in 2012.

Harrison says: “This is a sector that we think has massive potential for growth and we think that our offering will help to build a highly credible presence for Cape Town and South Africa more broadly in this fast-growing market.”

According to the international Travel Student Planning Guide, there is a growing desire among young people to learn additional languages – particularly English –to boost their career prospects. This has resulted in more than 2 million language travel students in the world today, a figure expected to increase to 2.5 million by 2020. Some studies have shown that the ability to speak a foreign language can boost earnings by up to 15%.

Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at UCT, Professor Sakhela Buhlungu, says that the school is one of the first initiatives from Humanities to offer a competitive and commercial course to compete on the open market. “Humanities is usually seen as the softer side of the university, but this offering is anything but soft,” he says. “We are offering professional and cutting-edge general and business English learning options that are geared towards making students more employable internationally.”

The ELC is not only geared towards capturing the international student market. It is also concerned with supporting local students and widening access into South African universities. Five months following inception, ELC tuition will now extend to include existing UCT students as well as those external applicants who demonstrate academic potential. The Faculty’s established academic support programmes, namely the Extended Degree and the “wannabe@humanities” recruitment programmes, provide the ideal pool of future beneficiaries.

Notes

1. **Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL):** A four week, UCT accredited course offered to train English Language teachers. Consists of classroom observation and teaching practice.
2. **English for Academic Purposes (EAP):** An English language course designed for students who need to use English in an academic context. Topics include essay writing and working with academic texts.

3. **International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA):** A non-profit organisation established to facilitate collaboration between universities and universities of technology in South Africa - working on international educational trends.
4. **Extended Degrees:** The Humanities Extended Degree programmes caters for first-year students who, although they do not meet the Faculty's entrance requirements (in terms of NSC points) have demonstrated the potential to be successful with addition academic support and mentorship. These students undertake the undergraduate degree over a 4 year period versus the standard 3 years.
5. **'Wannabe@humanities':** A UCT Faculty of Humanities student recruitment initiative targeting 100 high school learners per annum from historically disadvantaged schools. The objective is to identify, and mentor individuals with academic potential. This includes bringing them onto UCT campus to spend time with academic staff members and current Humanities students, providing basic computer training; assistance with the NBT and UCT application processes.

To find out more about the ELC, please visit <http://uctlanguagecentre.com>

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