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UNESCO Chair in Open Education and Social Justice bestowed on UCT professor

University of Cape Town's (UCT) Associate Professor Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams has been awarded the title of UNESCO Chair in Open Education and Social Justice for her contribution to ground-breaking research and implementing initiatives focused on open education in the global south.

Associate Professor Hodgkinson-Williams, based at UCT's Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT), teaches online learning design and advanced research design courses to postgraduate students.

A total 700 institutions in 116 countries are involved in the UNESCO Chairs Programme, an initiative of the UN. It seeks to promote international inter-university cooperation and networking to boost institutional capacities through knowledge sharing and collaboration. The network of chairs serves as a think tank and bridge-builder between academia, civil society and local communities, as well as researchers and policymakers.

Associate Professor Hodgkinson-Williams will focus on capacity building which she says involves developing and growing students and academics in the open education context. Mentoring and advising within UCT, as well as on open education projects outside of the institution, also forms part of her scope of work.

She describes open education as a process of sharing educational materials and resources, and exposing all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, to teaching and learning. It offers the freedom to reuse and share learning materials without any constraints, she explains, and provides students with equitable access to the material that they need at any time and any place.

"But it's not just about materials, it's about what we are teaching our students, in what language we are teaching them, the examples we're providing, and evaluating whose culture is being privileged in those materials," she says.

UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng congratulated Associate Professor Hodgkinson-Williams on her appointment, encouraging her to challenge the prevailing discourses on the topic and to help people around the world think wider than they already

do. "Social justice for us at UCT and in the country is something that we grapple with a lot, especially given the challenges that we've had in the past few years," she said.

According to Associate Professor Hodgkinson-Williams, cultural equality is a clear description of open education and social justice. It's having contextually appropriate materials that students can relate to, taught in a manner that they can understand, using a method they can appreciate. While UCT has made progress in this regard, she said it remains a key development area.

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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