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5 June 2020

Statement by the UCT executive on research paper by academic

The executive of the University of Cape Town noted with concern the publication in the South African Journal of Science of a research paper by UCT Professor Nicoli Natrass titled "Why are black South African students less likely to consider studying biological sciences?"

The UCT executive is concerned that the paper has methodological and conceptual flaws that raise questions about the standard and ethics of research at UCT.

The paper is constructed on unexamined assumptions about what black people think, feel, aspire to and are capable of. The commentary by Professor Natrass offers an example of research that is unable to examine the historical and ideological roots of academic disciplines and that is equally unaware of the role that power differentials have in closing or opening possibilities and choices in the life of individuals and communities. The paper is offensive to black students at UCT; black people in general and to any academic who understands that the quality of research is inextricably linked to its ethical grounding.

UCT welcomes rigorous and respectful debate on all issues pertaining to transformation. We endorse the right of critical review and response to published academic work, including in this case, commentaries, and the right of reply in these academic forums. We affirm our commitment to dealing with any instances of racism, sexism, discrimination of any sort or any unethical behaviour.

The executive distances itself from the content of the paper. We are investigating the matter further. The executive views this occurrence as yet again a moment to renew its resolve to foster a university culture that is aligned with our values and that is sensitive, inclusive and free of racial prejudices.

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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