



26 June 2020

UCT to host virtual sessions on global collaborations in higher education amid COVID-19 disruption

The University of Cape Town (UCT) will host a series of virtual events that will rethink global collaborations for a sustainable and equitable planet following the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of higher education international activities and the financial models on which universities increasingly depend.

The first in a series of events takes place on Monday, 29 June, and will focus on the future of conferences and international meetings.

'Unleashing the new global university' is a series of virtual events in which UCT invites innovative international and local speakers to have challenging conversations that help reimagine the internationalisation of higher education.

Rethinking a model on which so many universities depend will not be easy, says UCT Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, who initiated and will host the series of events. "If we don't step into our discomfort zone," says Phakeng, "we'll stay in the same place while the world changes around us. We need to disrupt ourselves so that we can lead the way, rather than follow wherever the change takes us."

Dr Katye Altieri, lecturer in oceanography at UCT and one of the Vice-Chancellor's 2030 Future Leaders, recently attended an extremely large virtual conference and says it was a great experience. "Having attended the online European Geosciences Union General Assembly 2020, with 26 000 earth scientists from 134 countries, it is easy to imagine continuing online conferences beyond COVID-19," she explains.

"I was planning to travel to Vienna for the conference, but no one else from my research group was attending, as it's too costly. All of my postgraduate students attended the virtual conference for at least one session, and many for the whole week, and they really benefitted from the online session interactions." Apart from the expense and the travel time involved, traditional, physical conferences are not always scintillating experiences.

Esther Ngumbi, assistant professor of entomology and African American studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is one academic who has argued for a complete rethink. "Every month, scientists gather at conferences around the world," she wrote in [Wired](#) in March this year, in an article entitled '[Science conferences are stuck in the Dark Ages](#)'. "Their topics range..., but they are equally dull, dated and drill like," she says. These conferences are critical

for academic success, but for decades, she argues, “the room has been the same: four walls, a podium and a projector.” Ngumbi is one of the speakers of the first UCT event, each of them engaging with a counterpart in a conversation that is primed to push boundaries and look for innovative solutions.

The other participants are Phil Baty, chief knowledge officer of Times Higher Education, Isabel Casimiro, president of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), and Altieri.

[Register](#)

[Follow the #newglobaluni conversation on Twitter.](#)

Future topics include undergraduate mobility and postgraduate international experiences.

Unleashing the new global university: the details

1. Monday 29 June | Academic conferences: how virtual can we go?
2. Monday 13 July | International collaborations: how can we shift the power towards Africa?
3. Monday 27 July | Undergraduate student mobility: are virtual experiences a realistic substitute?
4. Monday 24 Aug | Postgraduate researchers: can we rethink the international experience?
5. Monday 7 Sep | How does changing the medium change the way of doing things?

Each event runs from 17:30 to 18:30 (CAT/SAST).

Participants include:

- Katye Altieri, lecturer in oceanography, UCT
- Rifat Atun, professor of global health systems, Harvard University
- Phil Baty, chief knowledge officer of Times Higher Education
- Isabel Casimiro, president of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)
- Kelly Chibale, professor in organic chemistry, director of H3D Africa, UCT
- Andrew Gordon, CEO and founder, Diversity Abroad
- Catherine Odora Hoppers, professor in development education, UNISA
- Salome Maswime, professor in global surgery, UCT
- Ben Nelson, CEO, Minerva Project
- Esther Ngumbi, assistant professor of entomology and African American studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Issued by the Communication and Marketing Department

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