



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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Kresge Foundation funding to boost equitable student outcomes at UCT

The University of Cape Town (UCT) has been named among three new additions to the Kresge Education Program's Siyaphumelela Initiative. The initiative is aimed at identifying and addressing the systematic obstacles that stand in the way of equitable student success at tertiary level.

The US\$100 000 per year, three-year grant sees UCT join a national network of higher education institutions that are committed to putting in place systems that give all students an equal chance of achieving to their full potential.

UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng says effective analytics is a critical capability for understanding – and changing for the better – unsatisfactory performance patterns related to both race and particular fields of study among the university's students.

"It is our responsibility to understand and respond to challenges that we may have the power to influence. Our association with Siyaphumelela will give us the critical assistance we need to interrogate these patterns in order to make changes that impact positively at individual student level," she adds.

UCT will develop an institution-wide integrated data analytics system, explains Associate Professor Lis Lange, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning. "This will be specifically designed to produce the kind of meaningful data that will underpin the development of interventions to support student success, while also improving the quality of teaching and learning," she says.

Project lead Dr Riashna Sithaldeen says: "This is to be accomplished by harnessing and growing institutional capacity in data analytics and educational development towards student success." She adds that putting long-term student success "at the centre of everything that we do" is top priority.

The Kresge Foundation is a private philanthropic organisation. Learning from international examples of evidence-based student success networks, they launched Siyaphumelela in South Africa in 2014. The network is managed in partnership with the South African Institution for Distance Education, a South African non-profit committed to transforming education to increase equitable outcomes for all. Siyaphumelela works with the national

Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Universities South Africa, and participating universities to improve the country's capacity to drive data-based reforms. The ultimate aim is to boost the achievements of all tertiary students, regardless of their educational history.

"Siyaphumelela aims to ensure that all students get an equal opportunity to fulfil their university dreams," says Bill Moses, managing director of Kresge's Education Program. "We achieve this by increasing the cadre of trained South African data analytics professionals equipped to champion student success reforms on their campuses."

Siyaphumelela, together with the UCT Data Analytics for Student Success project led by Professor Suellen Shay, will coordinate the provision of data analytics for addressing the various challenges that stand in the way of equitable outcomes for all students in all fields.

END

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Thami Nkwanyane

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5672
Fax: (021) 650 3780
Cell: (072) 563 9500
Email: thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za