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Dean of UCT's largest faculty charts path for transformation



Professor Suki Goodman

Photo: Je'nine May

Professor Suki Goodman's appointment to lead the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Faculty of Commerce, also the university's largest faculty, came into effect on 1 January 2022, and eight months have passed at full speed. Lucky for Goodman, a professor in organisational psychology, it has been nothing but positive, exponential learning.

"The learning has been significant. I feel like I've never had to apply my mind harder than I have in the last few months. I learn from our students every day; I am learning more about myself and what it takes to be a competent educator and leader in a deeply complex, fast-moving, slow-to-change world. But I am deeply humbled and honoured that I've been deemed worthy of this significant responsibility," Goodman said.

Need for transformation

Goodman said the past eight months have been a rollercoaster ride. But it's a ride that she has embraced, with all its complexities and the highs and lows intact. Goodman has her eye firmly on the prize and is currently focused on just one thing: making an intentional contribution to helping the university reach its key objectives and to fully embed UCT's Vision 2030 into the faculty's ways of working.

"The vision of the faculty is to chart a path for transformation, and that transformation should be integrated in every aspect of the work we do," she said.

And it's a mighty, multi-layer job. It includes undertaking a massive curriculum review project, which involves relooking at pedagogic practices and reviewing opportunities to transform the curriculum. This work has already started and is led by the faculty's deputy dean for undergraduate affairs, Professor Ulrike Rivett. More than that, Goodman said, much effort is going into focusing on the students' and academics' research, to help ensure that it meaningfully impacts communities and society at large.

Goodman maintains that it would all be a lofty task without a group of highly competent, conscientious, and forward-thinking colleagues who give their all to students, the faculty and the university. With an almost brand-new dean's advisory committee, a few new deputy deans, and an entirely new cohort of heads of departments, she believes that the team is well equipped to get the job done.

"This work would be downright impossible without my colleagues. Working alongside this wonderful, committed group of people has been a joy of the highest order, not forgetting our incredibly talented students who are pursuing such challenging qualifications and doing it with deep determination," she said.

Doing things differently

To enable this hardworking and determined spirit among colleagues and students, Goodman said she is committed to doing things differently. Part of this, she added, is to keep a close eye on colleagues' roles and their career paths, and to evaluate the training and development options they require to fast-track and maximise their potential.

In addition, she said developing and supporting new, modern ways of working which are no longer tied to practices embedded in antiquated systems and processes are uppermost on her list. Similarly, creating opportunities for staff and encouraging them to take risks and effectively managing the failures that come with those risks is part of her job.

In the context of students, it is imperative to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and appropriate and will prepare them for the constantly evolving world of work. This, she said, requires developing problem-solving mindsets, and critical thinkers who are equipped to respond to the world and its challenges.

"If we're going to be unleashing our human potential, we need to think differently. We need to be thinking in ways that encourage a kind of creativity and collaboration," she said. "For me, it's important to encourage colleagues and students to experiment with new ways of thinking and doing, to be resilient in the face of failure and to have the courage to stand up and try again. Both staff and students are different now compared to 20 years ago and their needs and their aspirations are different too. We need to keep this front of mind to be successful."

Story by Niémah Davids, UCT News.

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