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University of Fort Hare VC Professor Buhlungu returns to UCT

Former UCT Dean of Humanities to deliver the TB Davie Lecture

The University of Cape Town (UCT) will host Vice-Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare (UFH), Professor Sakhela Buhlungu, who will present the 57th annual TB Davie Memorial Lecture.

Professor Buhlungu, a former Dean of Humanities at UCT, will deliver the lecture organised by the UCT Academic Freedom Committee on Wednesday, 23 August 2023 in the New Lecture Theatre, Upper Campus at 18:00. It is titled "Academic Freedom and Institutional Autonomy: A View from the Thyume Valley".

The late 1950s marked a negative turning point for higher education in South Africa. The Extension of University Act 45 of 1959 set the country on a path of ethnic segregation of university education whose effects remain more than 60 years later and after almost 30 years of democracy.

From 1959 eminent academics and activists were invited to present the TB Davie Memorial Lecture. Significantly for Buhlungu, Professor ZK Matthews – who graduated at UFH in 1924 and was an academic and political activist – gave the third lecture in 1961. Titled "African Awakening and the Universities", Professor Matthews' lecture made a link between academic freedom and the quest for liberation in South Africa and the continent.

UCT Vice-Chancellor (interim) Emeritus Professor Daya Reddy explained: "Professor Buhlungu, in this lecture, will identify four moments that marked the introduction of ethnic education and assault on academic freedom at UFH – the Extension of University Act of 1959, the appointment of Broederbond Professor JM De Wet in 1968, the closure and subsequent annexation of the Federal Theological Seminary to UFH in 1974/5, and the handing over of the university to the Ciskei Bantustan in 1981.

"These developments had a debilitating effect on the university, which the current administration still has to contend with today."

Buhlungu will present four propositions about academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the current conjuncture in South Africa. He will, among others, argue that academic freedom and institutional autonomy is contextual in that it means different things to different institutions because of our different histories, and that in the current period striving for academic freedom and institutional autonomy in one university is a futile exercise.

“Through the lecture, Professor Buhlungu will challenge people in the sector – staff, academics and administrators – to rethink the notions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the modern age,” said Reddy.

- Listen to a short [audio version](#).
- Members of the public wishing to attend the lecture can [register online](#).

About Professor Buhlungu

Professor Buhlungu received his BA at the then University of Transkei in 1982, BA Honours at UCT in 1986, MA and PhD at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1996 and 2002 respectively. He has held academic positions at several South African universities – Wits, University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria and UCT. Before taking up his current appointment at UFH, he was Dean of Humanities at UCT.

His PhD and scholarly work is in industrial sociology and labour studies. He has published extensively in his field, including peer-reviewed journal articles, chapters, books, and other newspaper articles; and presented numerous international conference papers and seminars. His monograph, “A Paradox of Victory: COSATU and the democratic transformation in South Africa”, remains one of the most cited scholarly works in labour studies during the democratic transition in South Africa. He was visiting scholar at the Five Colleges Programme at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA, in 2005 and served as an Ella Bhatt visiting professor at the University of Kassel, Germany from 2011 to 2012.

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