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UCT climate change fundi selected for 2023 Schmidt Science Polymath award

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) Dr Christopher Trisos has been named among the 2023 cohort of the Schmidt Science Polymath programme.

Dr Trisos plans to use the Schmidt Science Polymath award to support pathbreaking new research into how climate change impacts sport; for example, how increasing extreme heatwaves negatively affect athlete performance or the hosting of large sports events, as well as how sports organisations can adapt to climate change. He will also be using machine learning and big data tools to better understand climate change impacts on education and human health; for example, the effects of severe droughts on school completion rates and child nutrition.

The Schmidt Science Polymath programme recognises nine recently tenured, or equivalent status, professors with remarkable track records and the desire to explore risky new research ideas across disciplines to accelerate scientific breakthroughs.

Each awardee will receive \$500 000 a year, paid through their institutions, for up to five years, to help support their research. The 2023 awardees join a network of 12 existing [Schmidt Science Polymaths](#).

Dr Trisos is an ecologist and directs the [Climate Risk Lab](#), based at UCT's [African Climate and Development Initiative](#). The lab integrates insights from environmental and social sciences to better understand the risks to people and ecosystems from climate change, and how societies can respond to reduce risk. In 2019, Dr Trisos became one of the international climate scientists writing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 6th Assessment Report, including the assessment of Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability in Africa. He is also the author of a popular choose-your-own adventure book on climate change "[Survive the Century](#)" and his work on climate change impacts to food systems, ecosystems, and health has been featured widely in global media.

The programme is designed to push the boundaries of scientific and disciplinary limits by promoting the exploration of fresh methodologies and approaches in STEM to unlock breakthroughs and expedite progress in scientific discoveries. In receiving this award, the cohort receives support as they boldly transition from their established fields and enter into new disciplines or methodologies, bringing with them their expertise to conduct pioneering research. Through this model, the Polymaths' work plays a vital role in advancing

knowledge, fostering innovation, and exploring emerging technologies to test unconventional theories.

"The Schmidt Science Polymath award enables me to combine cutting-edge advances in climate science and machine learning tools to better predict where and when climate change impacts on people will occur, especially in Africa, and how we can respond to reduce the risks from climate change. This award lets us think out of the box and test some potentially ground-breaking ideas," said Trisos.

Support for each Polymath comes at a moment in their careers when scientists have the most freedom to explore new ideas, use emerging technologies and pursue novel scientific and interdisciplinary research in areas that are otherwise unlikely to receive funding.

"We have the potential to accelerate our rate of scientific discovery, and break the pattern of [decline](#) in truly disruptive research over time," said Eric Schmidt, co-founder with his wife Wendy of Schmidt Futures and former CEO and Chairman of Google. "However, this requires support for high-risk, high-reward projects that could advance our efforts to address climate change, fight disease, and unlock the mysteries of our universe. We are honoured to announce the 2023 cohort of the Schmidt Science Polymath Program. Their relentless pursuit of knowledge will push the boundaries of scientific exploration and drive transformational breakthroughs, paving the way for a brighter future for all."

Accomplished professors from over 58 universities submitted applications outlining research ideas in STEM fields that represent a substantive shift from their current portfolio. This new cohort will be joining twelve current Polymaths whose ideas range from the artificial creation of complex soft matter like human tissue to the development of synthetic biology platforms for engineering multicellular systems, to the discovery of exotic forms of quantum matter. The impact of this type of interdisciplinary research could result in innovations previously thought impossible like a 3D printer for human organs, climate change-resistant crops, or the unknown applications of quantum matter.

"We are pleased to bring together a group of determined researchers, each pursuing new research directions to tackle pressing global challenges," said Stuart Feldman, Chief Scientist of Schmidt Futures. "From improving brain imaging and addressing gender bias in medical research, to developing sustainable construction materials and advancing regenerative agriculture, these Polymaths' interdisciplinary work is poised to drive transformative advancements in diverse fields. They will join forces with the current 12 Polymaths, creating a dynamic community of scholars driven by intellectual curiosity and the shared goal of addressing some of the world's most pressing problems with fresh perspectives and bold ideas."

About Schmidt Futures

Founded by Eric and Wendy Schmidt, [Schmidt Futures](#) is a philanthropic initiative that finds and connects talented people across fields, generations, and geographies to harness their collective skills for public benefit.

Photo



Dr Christopher Trisos

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