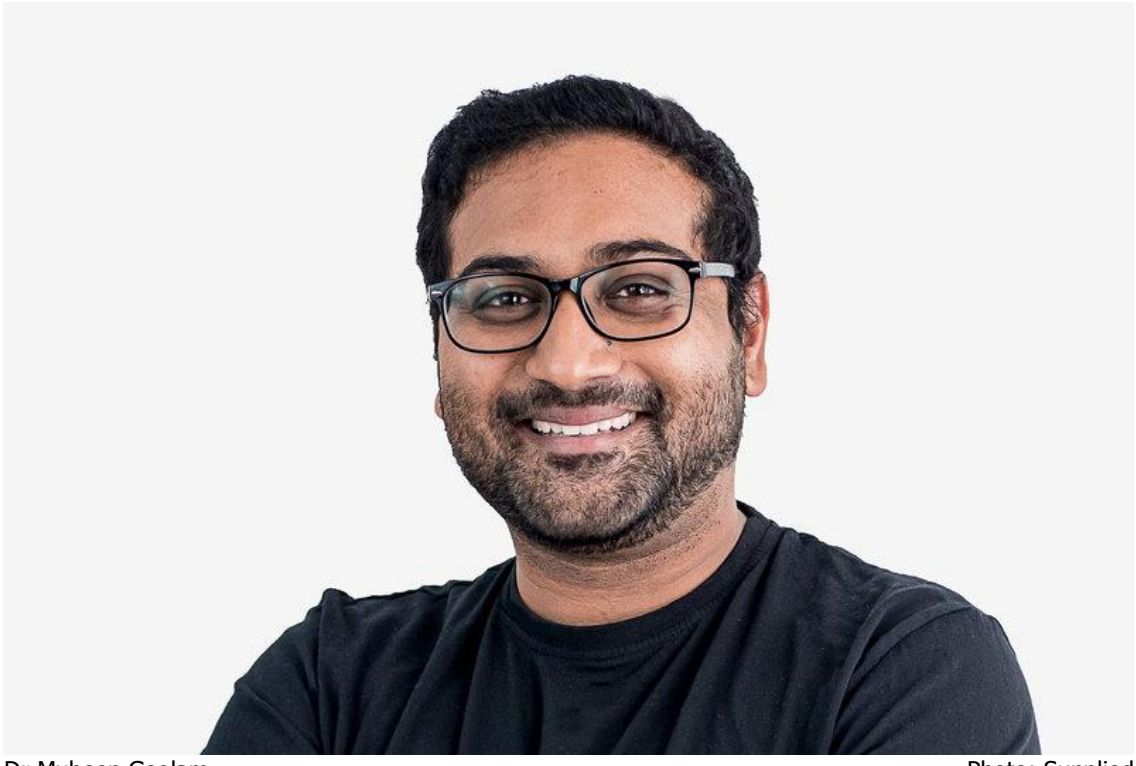
Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemarkingsdepartement

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

25 May 2026

UCT scientist earns top Harvard Fellowship for groundbreaking stem cell research



Dr Mubeen Goolam Photo: Supplied

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) Dr Mubeen Goolam – principal investigator of the Stem Cell Modelling of Development and Disease Group, jointly based in the Department of Human Biology and the Neuroscience Institute – has been awarded a 2026–2027 Harvard Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, a highly acclaimed award conferred to esteemed scholars across a multitude of disciplines.

The year-long fellowship provides him with a rare opportunity to pursue a unique project within an interdisciplinary environment. According to the institute, Radcliffe Fellows are at varying stages of their careers and come to the institution from all over the world, representing a broad range of academic, professional and artistic fields.

"This fellowship is a really valuable professional milestone for me. It recognises not just my scientific work but also highlights the importance of ensuring that emerging technologies develop in ways that are globally inclusive and socially responsive," Goolam said. "Coming from South Africa, it is especially meaningful to contribute African perspectives to international discussions on science policy and innovation."

Advancing research

Goolam is excited to kick-start his fellowship and engage with leading thinkers from around the world representing an array of disciplines. But most importantly, he said he looks forward to fast-tracking his research, which lies at the intersection of stem cell biology, ethics, governance and global equity.

His project, titled "Anticipating futures: Developing equitable policy guidelines for stem-cell-based organoids in Africa", will focus on creating practical policy guidelines for organoid research in South Africa and the rest of Africa.

Simply put, he said, organoids are powerful stem-cell-derived models that are transforming biomedical research and personalised medicine. Yet, much of the governance and decision-making around these technologies have been shaped outside Africa.

"Organoid research sits at the crossroads of science, policy, ethics and society. So, being able to engage with experts from different fields while on this fellowship will be invaluable. Another thing I'm looking forward to is to bring African perspectives into global conversations on emerging biotechnologies and to build collaborations that can strengthen equitable research and innovation across the continent."

Future-facing work

The project will also allow him to develop a framework that places equity, inclusion and African leadership at the centre of emerging organoid governance. It will harness scientific evidence, international policy frameworks and direct engagement with African stakeholders to produce guidance documents that can support governments, universities and research institutions.

Ultimately, the goal of the project is to ensure that African countries adopt future technologies and become active contributors to shaping their development and governance.

"This work is future facing. Many countries are only beginning to consider the ethical and policy implications of organoid science now. Africa has the opportunity to engage proactively rather than reactively. I believe this project can contribute to more inclusive, global scientific systems while also supporting the growth of cutting-edge biomedical research capacity across Africa," Goolam said.

Story by Niémah Davids, UCT News

Ends

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Thami Nkwanyane
Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer

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