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No plans to close Centre for African Studies, says UCT Dean

Statement by Professor Paula Ensor, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at UCT

Rumours have been circulating that the Centre for African Studies (CAS) at UCT is to be “closed down” and that students will no longer have access to the courses and programmes that have been offered by CAS in the past. This is not true. The Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town is investigating a proposal to merge the departments of Social Anthropology, Linguistics, the African Gender Institute (AGI) and the Centre for African Studies (CAS) into a new Department of Anthropology, Linguistics and Gender Studies. If the proposal is accepted, all programmes currently offered by all these departments, including CAS, would continue to be offered.

A number of points need to be emphasised in relation to this proposed merger. Firstly, the proposal is to disestablish the participating units as departments and not to close down their programmes. The present offerings of all of them, including CAS, would continue to be offered. The particular identity of the AGI would be protected, as the undergraduate major and postgraduate offerings would continue to be offered, and the research activities of the AGI would continue under its banner. The issue of a similar structure to hold and highlight the research interests of CAS colleagues has already been mooted with staff in CAS.

Secondly, it must be remembered that CAS was set up in the 1970s, not as an academic department in one faculty, but as a cross-faculty platform for debate and discussion about Africa. This was at a time when the study of Africa was marginalised at UCT. The situation at UCT is now quite different: the study of Africa is deeply rooted across the institution, and it is important that we reflect seriously, on an ongoing basis, about what the best vehicle is for driving UCT’s engagement with our continent as a whole.

Thirdly, discussions about the merger have taken place over years and have been open and transparent. This initiative emerges after years of discussion within the faculty about how to

deal with the challenges faced by small academic departments: problems of capacity when a staff member takes sabbatical leave, problems of diversity in academic offerings, and difficulties in recruiting staff. In 2010 the Dean's Advisory Committee and the Faculty Board of Humanities formally accepted a proposal that no academic department should have fewer than six full-time permanent academic staff members.

A faculty forum will be held at the end of February, which all colleagues will be able to attend and where a proposal for the merger will be tabled by Professor Paula Ensor, the Dean of Humanities. All staff and students, including those in CAS, will be welcome to voice their opinions on the proposal, which will then go to the Faculty Board in March.

ENDS

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