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Global Citizen Programme redesigned with African focus

After a successful decade of teaching University of Cape Town (UCT) students the value of paying it forward and the importance of participating in critical conversations, UCT's Global Citizenship Programme (GCP) has been redesigned with an African focus at the heart of its curriculum.

The GCP seeks to create civic-minded, community-oriented individuals who, when they leave the university, are both socially conscious and approachable professionals. The programme has three overarching objectives: to expose students to knowledge beyond their degree or discipline; to develop leadership skills, critical and reflective thinking; and to develop active listening and empathic facilitation and debating skills. Inculcating values such as social justice and social solidarity are fundamental.

Roughly 5 000 students have participated in the programme since its inception.

As the programme begins to reposition itself by adding an African touch to its curriculum, programme manager, Dr Benita Moolman, believes that the appetite among students will increase, especially among students from other African countries on campus. "Going forward in terms of repositioning GCP, we need to look at how we centre African experiences and how we understand the African student and look at ways of shaping the teaching and learning process in this way," Dr Moolman said.

The redesigned programme will also look at what it means to be an African student at an African institution of higher education and how students can contribute to knowledge co-creation as they locate themselves at UCT. "We have to learn from students, particularly African students across the continent," Moolman said.

The new approach will influence the community partners GCP will bring on board and will encourage conversations around topics like decoloniality, which, she said, had not been touched on in the past.

For Associate Professor Janice McMillan who co-founded the programme in 2010 and is now part of the GCP curriculum design team, adapting the programme to incorporate an African focus doesn't mean it will become "African theory 101".

Instead, McMillan explained, it's an opportunity for students to see the country and the continent through a different lens by placing students in a setting that they may be completely unfamiliar with and helping them understand it. "It's a different kind of

teaching and learning, where theory is used, but is also not used. Yes, teaching and learning might be historical, but that's not the primary objective."

The GCP also takes students into communities and brings the community leaders to campus to leverage their experiences. This process helps students to see that communities have valuable knowledge not taught through university-based courses. "Communities are knowledge-makers too," McMillan added.

The programme provides both students and academics with an opportunity to link the university to other constituencies like community partners and non-governmental organisations. "This programme allows us to develop practices and to unapologetically go into spaces off campus and use them as a place to learn from, while partnering with community organisations. An important facet of this programme is how we try to create what we call 'horizontal learning spaces' in which students and communities share knowledge and learn together," McMillan said.

ENDS

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