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UCT launches new student academy to answer global call for ethical, humane young leaders

The University of Cape Town (UCT) has answered the African and global call for well-equipped, ethical and humane young leaders when it launched the Leadership Academy, UCT Lead, on 15 August. The academy will target all UCT students and not only those in formal leadership roles.

UCT Lead's slogan, *Dala iiNkokheli*, isiXhosa for "Create Leaders", succinctly captures its mission. The cross-cutting academy was conceptualised by UCT's Department of Student Affairs (DSA) as part of its key strategic areas and brings together the concept of human-centred learning and development.

The aim is to realise the unique leadership potential in each UCT student, considering their individual needs, knowing of self, and co-creating a humanising and ethical environment, said Pura Mgolombane, the executive director of the DSA.

The focus key areas will include student governance leadership development, student life leadership development, and capacity building and innovation.

"UCT Lead will work to develop student leaders of integrity, compassion and ethics, able to serve the real needs of society and their communities," Mgolombane added. "The leadership academy will develop leaders that are humane and able to heal and nurture relationships on a deep and meaningful human level."

This will be achieved through a transformative learning process; one that involves a wide range of formal and informal, socially engaged undergraduate and postgraduate education, as well as specific co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes.

The objective is critical, given the country's historical context and its deeply divided and unequal society, said Mgolombane. "This requires agency and leadership that is developed in unique ways and that can contribute to a human-centric model of leadership," he added.

The academy will also place UCT at the forefront of leadership development research and practice in South Africa, cement its role as a leader in higher education and deepen the university's ongoing transformation agenda, Mgolombane said.

Best practice

UCT Lead, which has been in development since 2021, is a direct response by the DSA to UCT's Vision 2030 and its mission to unleash human potential for a fair and just society. The journey began with a nationwide benchmarking exercise in leadership development best practice. An internal mapping exercise of UCT's existing leadership development opportunities followed.

Many strong leadership initiatives already exist across the university at faculty and departmental levels. These include student governance entities such as the Students' Representative Council (SRC), residence committees, the executive leadership of student societies, student peer mentors and peer educations as well as other extra-curricular opportunities that offer student innovation and entrepreneurship programmes.

However, UCT Lead will act as an integrated hub for these partnerships, aligning and coordinating these as a collective institutional response, said Mgolombane.

Human-centred approaches

To foster a nurturing and caring environment that facilitates student well-being, UCT Lead is driven by 'three Ps':

- a humanising pedagogy, which values human dignity and nobility in all teaching and developmental practices.
- a pedagogy of discomfort, which recognises that personal growth and development happen at points of sufficient discomfort – these should be coupled to necessary support systems.
- and a pneumatological pedagogy, which acknowledges the unique capacity and needs humans have for meaning, purpose, direction and spirituality in life – these acknowledge neuroscientific perspectives that include the spiritual dimension that exists beyond rational human knowing.

Research

As part of a research-driven university, UCT Lead is committed to a scientific, evidence-based approach to leadership development that uses data and data analytics to guide its development theories and praxis. The aim is to ensure that UCT Lead makes a significant contribution to existing research, knowledge and thought leadership in students' leadership development.

Story by Helen Swingler, UCT News.

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