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UCT Call for Interdisciplinary Research Institutes
MAY 2015

Dear colleagues

I am very pleased to announce the long-awaited call for interdisciplinary research institutes, already alluded to in our new strategy for research[1] that was passed by Senate and Council in 2014. The call for a set of new[2] flagship research areas is a response to the abundant evidence of great potential at UCT to invigorate interdisciplinary research and to give such scholarship a higher profile.

The proposed institutes are designed to facilitate large interdisciplinary ventures[3] and will be selected on the following criteria. They must :

1. be interdisciplinary,
2. be based on an uncontested geographical or situational advantage, and draw on areas in which UCT is internationally competitive, taking into account South African and African priorities,
3. have significant critical mass,
4. produce outcomes that go beyond that which is achievable within present structures,
5. be headed by a researcher with considerable international recognition, and
6. provide opportunities for postgraduate studies that significantly enhance student experience and prospects through team-based integration and networking.

In addition they must:

7. demonstrate opportunities for leveraging additional funding,
8. demonstrate strategic collaboration and astute partnerships,
9. be guided by a business plan, and
10. be aligned with UCT's mission and objectives.

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[1] The University of Cape Town: The realisation of its research potential (2015 – 2015)

[2] 'New' must be seen in the context of what is said in paragraph two of this background section.

[3] *This means that the platform should adhere to the Senate policy on the nomenclature of research groupings. The criteria are the following:*

- Operationally an institute is larger than a centre.
- An institute has a broad research mandate that spans across disciplines or sub-disciplines and implies extensive collaboration on a wide range of associated research questions.
- An institute has a formal management structure with a director of considerable international standing and several research teams, which are individually headed by internationally recognised researchers, and constitute a large-scale network of researchers.
- The director and several team leaders should be permanent academic staff whose major time and commitment is to the institute.
- Categorisation of membership based on the percentage of time spent in the institute is encouraged. Membership categories would for example include full, affiliate, associate and adjunct, thus indicating varying degrees of time commitment to the institute.
- An institute has ongoing projects and measurable outcomes evolving from its broad research mandate.
- An institute is sustainable over a long-term period.

It will be an added advantage if they produce opportunities for the renewal of the curriculum.

The purpose of this initiative is to build on the success of the six signature themes[4] all of which have excelled at productivity beyond the sum of their parts. (Should any of the current signature themes wish to refocus and evolve into different entities that comply with the criteria for the new institutes as outlined in this document, they may be considered for the new funding, in competition with other contestants – as would any existing grouping that satisfies the criteria.)

The proposed institutes are also intended to enhance engagement with international partners and funders, since so much of the most significant funding opportunities require a partnership-based, interdisciplinary, problem-focused approach.

The call

Pre-proposals for five new institutes are now invited. Deans should develop a mechanism to choose one institute for which the faculty would be willing to take administrative responsibility. If the faculty is putting forward more than one, the dean should indicate the order of preference. In order to ensure that Faculty priorities play as small a role as possible in regards to the chances of success of proposals, pre-proposals may be submitted through more than one Faculty.

The deadline for the deans to make their Faculty's submission is ~~Wednesday 17 June 2015~~ <mark>Monday 20 July 2015.</mark> Pre-proposals should take the form of a concept document (not more than 10 pages in length) and be sent directly to the Research Office (marilet.sienaert@uct.ac.za).

If a particular pre-proposal is selected by the central decision making body, a full proposal will be required that will be peer-evaluated prior to an award being made.

Seed funding of R1m per annum would be awarded to each institute and it is envisaged that the seed funding will continue for 6 years. The seed funding will be awarded as follows: an initial award will be made for a period of 3 years, with a possibility of renewal for a further 3-year cycle, dependent on the outcome of a peer-review process and available funding. To enable each institute to gain a quick foothold, we are providing for the first cycle of three years an additional amount of R400k as buy-out of time to assist with capacity to build the platform. The starting date for each institute will be negotiated at the time of the award to the relevant home Faculty.

Institute Governance

Each Institute will be led by a director who is also an academic within an academic department. The exact expectations of the director, the governance, and how the institutes will be aligned to other university and faculty structures are being worked out in consultation with deans of Faculties and will be communicated through appropriate channels once finalised. It is understood that the establishment of an appropriate governance model is of critical importance, but the governance structure needs to be aligned to the overall model for interdisciplinarity currently being developed (see below) and we did not want to hold up the call until these arrangements have been finalized. However, it is likely that each institute will be allocated a departmental organisational code, with the director reporting directly to the DVC (with responsibility for research) through the Host Faculty's dean, and with representation on the deans' advisory committees. Subsidy earnings are likely to be accrued to the home department of authors of publications linked to the institute, and to the department in which a postgraduate student linked to the institute is registered.

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[4] Although their URC seed funding come to an end this year, they will all retain their status and visibility as signature themes within the UCT landscape. Other examples of existing research flagship initiatives that are already renowned are the *Institute for Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine*, the new inter-university *Centre for SKA-Driven Big Data and Data-Intensive Research* and the VC's initiatives such as *Africa Climate and Development* and *Poverty and Inequality.*

Host Faculties

The reporting line of the director to the DVC (through the relevant dean) will assure the strategic independence of the institute despite its administrative location. A host-faculty policy will be put in place and will be informed by the strategy for interdisciplinarity that is current being developed in the DVC portfolio of Professor Francis Petersen.

Thank you in advance for your interest and collaboration.

Sincerely

Professor Danie Visser (Deputy Vice Chancellor with responsibility for research).