



Humanities footprint

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The

state of humanities in South Africa was in the spotlight in 2011 with the publication of two major reports that point to an alarming decline in the field across the country. While the reports, one commissioned by the Academy of Science of South Africa, and the other by Higher Education and Training Minister Dr Blade Nzimande, are in many respects very different, and while there has been contestation about their foci and respective findings, both warn of a crisis in humanities that is threatening to undermine South Africa's youthful democracy. The ASSAf report points to declining student enrolments, falling graduation rates and decreasing government funding for humanities in higher education institutions, as well as the lack of international standing and status of much humanities scholarship. While the contribution of the Faculty of Humanities to research at UCT shows that it bucks these trends in significant ways, there is no room for complacency and the faculty is committed to strengthening research and teaching in this vital area.



Making the case for humanities

Professor Paula Ensor, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at UCT, says she is often asked why anyone should consider studying in the humanities. Her answer is that society needs the skills that humanities graduates bring – now more than ever.

“There are a great many humanities graduates doing exciting and important work out in the world,” she says. “Against the backdrop of rapidly growing populations and accelerating technological capabilities, we are encountering ongoing crises – climate change, global economic insecurity, poverty, and violence. Humanities disciplines offer the analytical and interpretive skills to help us make sense of this complexity. They provide the intellectual and moral frameworks to help us solve many of society’s most intractable problems.

“In many ways, the humanities are the moral compass and the soul of society – without which, the most remarkable scientific achievements lack context.”

However, while this is demonstrably true, humanities disciplines around the world are being sidelined and South Africa is no exception. The plight of humanities in the country was highlighted in 2011 with the publication, within a month of each other, of two influential reports. The first, *The Consensus Study on the State of Humanities in South Africa*, commissioned by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), charts the ineluctable decline of humanities across the country.

From 1996 to 2008, according to the ASSAf report, government funding for the humanities decreased in real rands. During the same time period, enrolments in humanities – excluding in education, which has grown – declined on average 2 percent every year. This despite the fact that there was an overall increase in tertiary (head count) enrolment of 2,6 percent every year. Research output from many humanities faculties is also stagnating.

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Rediscovering the voice of humanities and social sciences

It is this situation that prompted Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, to commission the second of the reports published in 2011, the *Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences*, which was co-ordinated by UCT’s Professor Ari Sitas, of the Department of Sociology, and Dr Sarah Mosoetsa from the University of the Witwatersrand.

Minister Nzimande’s starting point is that the humanities and social sciences played a vital role in shaping the struggle against Apartheid, but that in the post-1994 period, their influence has waned.

“In the past two decades, the social sciences and humanities have taken a back seat. Now is the time for the teaching of – and research in – the social sciences and humanities to take their place again at the leading edge of our struggle for the transformation and development of South African society,” says Minister Nzimande in a media statement on the Charter.

“In many ways, the humanities are the moral compass and the soul of society – without which, the most remarkable scientific achievements lack context.”

The Charter recognises that in the past two decades, the government has had to focus on the so-called ‘critical skills’ of natural sciences, technology, and business studies, but it calls for far-reaching reforms to rescue the humanities from relative neglect.

“After two decades of market fundamentalism, university councils and executives will find it hard to value again what they had devalued,” Professor Sitas wrote in a *Mail & Guardian* editorial on the topic. Turning the situation around is going to be a challenge.

It is a challenge to which UCT’s Faculty of Humanities, the largest faculty at UCT, and one of the leading humanities faculties in South Africa, is rising. The statistics gathered in the ASSAf report show that the faculty is bucking the trend on several metrics. It is oversubscribed overall at the undergraduate level, and in many postgraduate programmes. Research output is robust and areas such as philosophy and the performing and creative arts, which the two reports lift out as being undersubscribed nationally, are robustly active at UCT. In the latest *Quacquarelli*

Next generation at HUMA

The humanities have long been vital to the creative and critical energies of societies in the throes of profound change. HUMA – the Institute for Humanities in Africa – was launched in 2010 at UCT, to create a space of dynamic inter-disciplinary community for scholars and students in the humanities at large. HUMA's two overarching research themes are *On Being Human* and *Circuits of Consumption*.

The Institute is located in the faculties of Humanities and Law, thereby taking a broad view of the humanities, encompassing the social sciences and law.

In a milestone step in 2011, HUMA recruited its first doctoral researchers. Professor Deborah Posel, HUMA's founding director, welcomed the researchers into the institute's fold.

"Our doctoral programme occupies a central place at HUMA – it's at the heart of our efforts to contribute to the next academic generation," she says. "I am thrilled to be working with four talented, lively and



(From left) Sarai Chisala, Safiyya Goga, Bianca Camminga and Justin Brown are HUMA's first doctoral researchers.

intellectually curious doctoral fellows who have also committed themselves to playing an active part in shaping HUMA's future."

Symonds (QS) rankings of universities (in which UCT is the only African university to feature in the top 200), subject areas within the Faculty of Humanities – notably English language and literature, history, and education – are among the highest performers, helping to push the university to its overall ranking of around 160.

Return on investment

Professor Ensor maintains that this is because the university has a strong belief – and has made a significant investment – in humanities in recent years and that this is starting to pay off. "The faculty values intense and invigorating teaching and learning," says Professor Ensor. "In the past decade, several major new initiatives are helping to foster research and scholarship."

The most notable of these are the establishment of the Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA) in 2010, which is focusing and channelling inter-disciplinary research in two broad themes: *On Being Human* and *Circuits of Consumption*, and in 2008, the founding of the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA), which facilitates new collaborative and inter-disciplinary creative research projects in the disciplines of music, dance, fine art, drama, creative writing, and film and media studies. Other important research groupings in the faculty include the Centre for Contemporary Islam (CCI), the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (ICRSA), the

Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA) and the Centre for Social Sciences Research (CSSR).

The faculty is also home to four DST/NRF SARCHI Chairs in: Archives and Public Culture (held by Professor Carolyn Hamilton); Land Reform and Democracy in South Africa (held by Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza); Migration, Language, and Social Change (held by Professor Rajend Mesthrie); and Islam, African Publics and Religious Values (held by Professor Abdulkader Tayob).

The scholarly range of the SARCHI Chairs illustrates the breadth of research in the faculty, which spans 15 academic departments in three main clusters – the arts, the social sciences, and the creative and performing arts.

Inter-disciplinary research and collaboration

Research highlights from the past year span many departmental and research groupings. For example, the project on Archive and Curatorship (ARC), pulls together a number of projects across the university involving the collection, curation, and digitising of unique archives. Boosted by a Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Grant, ARC launched a new website in 2011 (www.arc.uct.ac.za) that showcases many of these unique collections and provides a platform that radically opens up knowledge for public consumption.

Research groupings associated with this theme

■ African Cinema Unit

The African Cinema Unit was established in 2008. It is an initiative within the Centre for Film and Media Studies that is committed to promoting the study of African cinemas, taking account of the richness and diversity of the film cultures that have emerged from the countries that make up this vast and complex continent. During 2010, Associate Professor Martin Botha took a sabbatical to finish a 113-year history of South African cinema. Taking an inclusive approach to the South African film history, this volume represents an ambitious attempt to analyse and place in appropriate socio-political context the aesthetic highlights of South African cinema from 1896 to the present. This manuscript, which is due for publication in early 2012, represents the first broadly based text that encompasses the history of South African cinema in its entirety. During 2011 a strategy document for the ACU was finalised, as well as a constitution for the African Cinema Unit Governing Board (ACUGB), which was established at the end of the year.

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■ Centre for Contemporary Islam

The Centre for Contemporary Islam (CCI) was established in 1996 to co-ordinate research conducted at UCT on Islam and Muslim societies, and disseminates findings to a broader public. The main projects of the CCI include Islam and Public Life in Africa; Sufism, Gender, and Islam; and the Timbuktu Manuscripts Project. The CCI publishes the annual *Journal for Islamic Studies*. The centre is based in the Department of Religious Studies, but it has the active participation of scholars from outside the department as well.

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■ Centre for Popular Memory

The Centre for Popular Memory (CPM) is an Africa-focused oral history research, advocacy, and archival centre, linked to the Department of Historical Studies. Research prioritises multilingual approaches to the impact of post-traumatic legacies in Africa and specialises in multi-levelled technology outputs through academic journals, exhibitions, and film, including scholarly content for portable media platforms. Through the African Oral

History Archive project, the CPM has more than 3 000 oral history recordings in 12 languages, many with full transcripts and translations. These have been preserved, migrated, and gathered over 25 years. The African Memory Project (AMP) aims to increase access to and use of oral and visual collections in Africa, and collaborates with international leaders in fields of oral history and memory studies to analyse Africa-centred research materials. Memories of Apartheid is a key project of AMP that seeks to engage civil society on various levels and includes a number of transnational and international research and educational partners. The project will develop a large-scale oral history programme and conduct filmed oral history interviews with people who lived through Apartheid, across South Africa. It will also develop a centralised digital archival model for the gathering and dissemination of audio-visual archival material for educational use on an international scale.

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■ Centre for Rhetoric Studies

The centre was founded in 1995 and remains unique on the continent, where it has pioneered the emergence of rhetoric studies (as mentioned in Blackwell's *International Encyclopedia of Communication*). It concerns itself with multi-disciplinary research in public rhetoric, deliberative democracy, and argumentative culture. The centre engages in three main activities: hosting research fellows, organising academic conferences, and registering postgraduate students (master's and PhD). It publishes its findings through the *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* (AfricaRhetoric Publishing). The Centre has a near-100 percent success rate in numerous competitively funded international research projects.

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■ Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa

The Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (ICRSA) is dedicated to the postcolonial study of religion and religions in South Africa and the Southern African region. In addition to developing resources for the study of religions and reconfiguring the study of religion from a Southern African perspective, ICRSA has participated in international research projects in religious education

and cultural heritage. ICRSA houses the peer-reviewed, accredited *Journal for the Study of Religion*.

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■ Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research

The Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research was established in 1980 under the terms of a gift to the University of Cape Town by the Kaplan Kushlick Foundation and is named in honour of the parents of Mendel and Robert Kaplan. It is an autonomous centre, with its own governing body. The centre is the only one of its kind in South Africa. It seeks to stimulate and promote the whole field of Jewish studies and research at the university with a special focus on the South African Jewish community. The centre is multi-disciplinary in scope and encourages the participation of scholars in a range of fields including history, political science, education, sociology, comparative literature, and the broad spectrum of Hebrew and Judaic studies.

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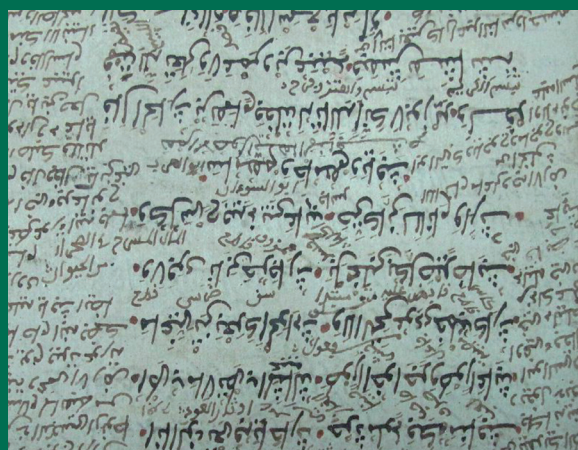
■ Lucy Lloyd Archive, Resource and Exhibition Centre

The Lucy Lloyd Archive, Resource and Exhibition Centre (LLAREC) is a research centre aimed at the promotion of the visual as a site of meaning and knowledge. Its focus is on collections and curatorship, through which objects are allowed to become both sites of knowledge and mnemonics and reference can be made to a wider resonance of meaning. At the heart of the centre's curatorial practice is the issue of representation, and many of its projects have interrogated the ways in which the historical, social, and medical construction of identity have been revealed through representation. Major projects have included the publication of the Bleek and Lloyd archive, the production of portfolios and artists' books and the installation of exhibitions at a variety of venues. LLAREC incorporates the Katrine Harries Print Cabinet and is now part of the Centre for Curating the Archive, which includes major photographic collections and a visual history archive, and projects that curate them.

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From the Timbuktu Manuscripts Project.

■ Research Institute on Christianity and Society in Africa (RICSAs)

The Research Institute on Christianity and Society in Africa (RICSAs) has engaged in research on religion in public health, globalisation, and public theology. Its primary activity recently has been with the affiliated African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP), a multi-institutional, multi-site, inter-religious, trans-disciplinary collaborative research project that is co-ordinated at UCT. Initiated in 2003, with colleagues from Emory University, it includes academics and practitioners from other centres in South Africa, has a strong partnership with Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare (a seven-hospital system in Memphis, USA), and works with several other collaborating partners in Africa, Europe and the USA. During 2011, ARHAP was renamed the International Religious Health Assets Programme (IRHAP). IRHAP focuses on mapping and assessing religious health assets, policy processes, and capacity building on the interface between religion and public health. Its most recent work has been with the Hospice Palliative Care Association of South Africa on building community partnerships for health system strengthening. It is conducting research on male peace and safety in the context of interpersonal violence (three sites in South Africa and the USA, in conjunction with the Medical Research Council and the UNISA-based Peace and Safety Lead Programme), and is taking more of an interest in health systems and primary health care. RICSAs is also known for its published (UNISA Press, CD-ROM) multi-year, multi-volume project on the social history of Christianity in South Africa.

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Research groupings associated with this theme

■ Centre for Social Science Research

The Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR) is an inter-disciplinary research centre dedicated to conducting and building capacity for systematic, evidence-based, policy-relevant, replicable social science research in South Africa and across Africa. CSSR projects are usually team-oriented, bringing together multiple local and international researchers, and offering postgraduate students significant opportunities for hands-on training. Research findings are presented and discussed at regular weekly seminars and published as CSSR working papers. Substantively, the CSSR conducts research in the broad areas of globalisation, industrialisation, democratisation, development, poverty, and public health. The Social Surveys Unit conducts research on a range of social dynamics, using survey data (especially the Cape Area Panel Survey and the Cape Area Survey) and related qualitative data. The Democracy in Africa Research Unit conducts research on a range of issues around democratisation in South and Southern Africa, using public opinion data but also creating new systematic databases on elections, legislatures, and local government. The AIDS and Society Research Unit conducts research on the social impact of HIV/AIDS, including issues of parenting, disclosure, sexual behaviour, and public welfare. Finally, the Policy Research on International Services and Manufacturing Unit conducts research on globalisation, industrialisation, innovation, and the dynamics of global value chains on developing country industrial sectors.

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As it grows, the project, which is spearheaded by Professor Carolyn Hamilton, and Professor Pippa Skotnes, Director of the Centre for Curating the Archive at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, aims to participate in developing university-wide policies for the research and curation of archives, and to establish UCT as a repository for valuable collections for innovative research. Already it is developing a postgraduate focus in curatorship, and is forging relationships with other institutions in the city.

Another initiative that is seeking to preserve the precious treasures of the past and render these more accessible to future generations is the Tombouctou Manuscripts Project, headed by UCT's Shamil Jeppie, from the Department of Religious Studies. Since 2002, the project has been working with various aspects of the manuscript tradition of Mali, including the research, translation, and digitisation of ancient documents from the region – one of Africa's great historical centres of learning. In 2011, a delegation from UCT visited Timbuktu to attend a major academic conference and further cement ties with researchers there. One of the research spin-offs of this project is to raise questions about the history of the book in Africa and the politics of the archive.

Another unit within the faculty that consistently raises often uncomfortable questions in the national debate on HIV/AIDS, democratisation, development, poverty, and public health, is the Centre for Social Science Research, which marked its 10th anniversary in 2011. It has spearheaded a number of important new research initiatives, including a major collaboration with the Max

Planck Institute for the Study of Ethnic and Religious Diversity. This 'super-diversity' project is examining the increasingly complex social formations inherent in South African society.

Over the past year, the CSSR has also appointed a number of key academic staff to assist in the development of graduate courses in quantitative social science.

As part of other initiatives to nurture teaching and research, the faculty collaborated with the Faculty of Law to launch the first-ever university course in Muslim Personal Law and Human Rights at master's degree level – one of four courses that make up the Faculty of Law's inter-disciplinary master's degree in human rights.

The co-convenors of the new course are Professor Abdulkader Tayob and Dr Waheeda Amien, a lecturer in the Faculty of Law and a leading member of the Recognition of Muslim Marriages Forum.

In 2011, the faculty invested in a new high-tech postgraduate computer laboratory, known as the Postgraduate Commons, to support senior students.

Professor Ensor comments that all of these initiatives are part of an ongoing effort to create the conditions for research to grow and flourish in the faculty, so that humanities students can continue to do what they do best: shine a light onto many of the ethical and practical issues of the time. The ASSAf report – to which Professor John Higgins of UCT made a significant contribution –

DST/NRF SARCHI Chairs associated with this theme

■ Migration, Language, and Social Change



Rajend Mesthrie is Professor of Linguistics at UCT and the holder of the DST/NRF Research Chair on Migration, Language, and Social Change. His work focuses on language contact and variation in South Africa, showing how languages

of the country have influenced each other in overt and sometimes subtle ways. He is a past President of the Linguistics Society of Southern Africa (2001-2009). Among his recent publications are *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (ed, CUP, 2012) and *A Dictionary of South African Indian English* (UCT Press, 2010). He is co-editor of the CUP journal *English Today*.

■ Islam, African Publics and Religious Values



Professor Abdulkader Tayob obtained his doctoral degree in 1989 from Temple University in the USA. He is an internationally recognised scholar in the study of modern Islam in general, and Islam in Africa in particular. His recent books on Education

(2011), *Modern Islam* (2009) and a collaborative translation of an early historical text (2011), add

to his earlier books on Islam in South Africa. In addition, he has published numerous articles and book chapters on the study of religion, Islam in Africa, and modern Islamic thought. He continues to hold a number of editorial positions in local and international journals, and has edited and co-edited a number of volumes, the largest such project being the Macmillan reference *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2003).

■ Archive and Public Culture



Professor Carolyn Hamilton was recruited to this position as a consequence of the strategic significance of the country's archival estate and its interpretation in open and critical ways, for the national priority of developing social cohesion. The appointment

was made in the light of UCT's already significant investments and achievements across a number of disciplines, in critical archival engagements, archive curation projects, and collaborations with public culture institutions, including collaborations in heritage training carried out in partnership with the University of the Western Cape. Professor Hamilton took up the position at UCT in mid-2008.

■ Land Reform and Democracy in South Africa

Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza is profiled on page 160.

puts the case eloquently. "Humanities are indispensable, producing an essential set of analytical skills, along with bodies of knowledge, without which our society and the wider world would be inscrutable. It is the humanities that nurture the intellectual lifeblood of a democratic project through powers of informed analysis, judgment, and creative critique," it states.

According to the report, humanities studies perform several critical functions to maintain a balanced and stable society. Firstly, they interrogate ideas of what it is to be human and to work and live with other humans in society and in communities. Secondly, they foster communication – the imperative of understanding and

interpreting messages in all their forms, from teaching the basics of speech to the deepest appreciation of creative and performing arts. Thirdly, they teach problem solving and have historically played a key role in resolving social and other challenges including, as Minister Nzimande highlighted in the Charter on Humanities, the end of Apartheid.

"A vibrant humanities is essential if we want to build a world that is sustainable, that is just and that provides adequately for all," says Professor Ensor.

"We must continue to ensure that UCT's research is playing its part in this regard."