

Free thinkers wanted to build Africa's future

The University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) has launched a new masters programme that is seeks to recruit free thinkers to invent and reinvent relevant, inclusive, innovative solutions for African socio-economic challenges.

UCT GSB is looking for highly motivated individuals to spend a year in a unique, free thinking, applied academic programme to envision a better future for Africa. Applications are now open for the MPhil in Inclusive Innovation, a new Master's degree that gets under way in February 2013.

The programme is at the heart of a new initiative at the GSB to explore unorthodox, innovative and applied solutions to African challenges.

Dr François Bonnici, director of the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the GSB says that creating the conditions for creative people from across the spectrum of disciplines to work together on complex challenges is a vital first step in allowing such innovation to thrive.

"The source of innovation increasingly flows from individuals who are unconstrained by set cultures or organisations, who are deeply committed to changing the world for the better, and who are given the opportunity to collaborate with others, said professor Kosheek Sewchurran, who co-convenes the MPhil with Bonnici and brings his expertise in innovation management, information systems and integrative thinking to the programme.

"The fuel to innovate is created when these kinds of people, with their vast expertise, life experience, passion and ideas, come together with free reign and in an environment poised to support new possibilities," he said.

Inspired by the MIT Media Lab

Julius Akinyemi, resident entrepreneur at MIT Media Lab and Visiting Innovation Fellow at the GSB, said that the GSB programme draws much of its inspiration from the world-famous MIT Media Lab.

"MIT has championed a multidisciplinary model since 1985. The phenomenal thing about the approach is that it teams up people who are not discipline experts, allowing designers, engineers, artists and scientists to work together to look at different challenges anew to answer the unasked questions that change our lives," said Akinyemi.

MIT Media Lab has given the world such notable inventions as the electronic ink technology used in kindles, e-readers and nooks, and the Hiriko Folding City Car. And the GSB Master's, while not a product focused degree, hopes to produce inclusive solutions on a similar scale that are relevant to Africa's future.

"We are seeking to generate world-class innovations that help build Africa's future," said Akinyemi. "We are unleashing human capability that catapults us to new heights and levels the playing fields with the rest of the world."

Bonnici and Sewchurran explained that the programme will explore several themes, ranging from human computer interactions, social innovation strategies, inclusive business designs, and applied communications technology to aspects of Africa's health and education delivery and management systems as well as sustainable business actualisation. The solutions generated are not limited to business application but could be taken up by government or civil society.

Radical innovation and sustainable solutions for Africa

"We are not placing limits on anything," says Bonnici. "Our goal is radical innovation and sustainable solutions for Africa and we don't really worry what shape or form these take - only that they work."

Students will spend the majority of their time on research activities and the creation and live demonstrations of their inventions. While each student will be expected to produce a unique idea or process, they will work in collaboration with their peers for the duration of the year-long programme.

Walter Baets, director of the GSB, said that he is personally looking forward to working with the students on this Master's and witnessing the evolution of the programme.

"We are looking for people who are bright and who are extremely passionate about making a difference," said Baets. "Not your average student, but someone who has proven themselves and now just wants to think wild thoughts, and learn how to apply these ideas to create radical business models, services and products."

Scholarships for 2013

As part of the school's investment in the programme, it is offering several full scholarships for the 2013 intake - to be awarded on merit to the best applicants.

"It is all part of our commitment to being relevant as a leading business school in Africa that is responsive to the needs of the continent," said Baets. "This programme will help put that into action, through the ideas and innovations it aims to generate, nurture and realise."

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