Centre for Higher Education Development

Academic Development Programme
Centre for Educational Technology
Centre for Information Literacy
Centre for Open Learning
Higher and Adult Education and Development Studies Unit
Dean’s Office
“An overview of CHED’s research output points to a body of scholarship which is responsive to pressing national and institutional needs in higher education.”
The vision of the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) is to be a cross-faculty unit that contributes to continual improvement in the quality of higher education through widening access, promoting excellence through equity, developing the curriculum in partnership with faculties, and enhancing the competence of graduates by ensuring the provision of key skills.

CHED’s research mission is to ensure that its educational development work is based on rigorous and ethical research that will serve the objectives of providing equitable access to higher education, enabling social redress through higher education, and generally strengthening the quality of teaching and learning in higher education at UCT, in South Africa, and in countries with similar needs. CHED’s research arises from both institutional need and individual interest, comprising all areas connected to teaching and learning, including the basic disciplines in which some of us are based.

A further objective is to enable systemic improvement through the research-led development of policy options at national and institutional level. For this reason, a considerable proportion of the research efforts of CHED staff goes into institutional research (for example, into the impact of the introduction of anonymous marking on student performance, or the reasons why some students in good academic standing drop out of the system), and national research (for example, in response to requests from such agencies as the Department of Higher Education and Training or the Higher Education Quality Committee).

An overview of CHED’s research output points to a body of scholarship which is responsive to pressing national and institutional needs in higher education. Examples include research into the interface between schooling and higher education and issues of access, selection and placement; improving the quality of teaching and learning in discipline-specific contexts such as Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics and Information Systems, the role of tertiary educators in a changing higher education landscape; and the challenges and possibilities of Information and Communication Technology for teaching and learning. CHED contributes to national debate on these issues, among many, through a strong presence in South African journals (e.g. South African Journal of Higher Education, Southern Africa Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, South African Computer Journal, South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science). CHED’s contribution extends internationally as CHED staff are now consistently publishing in the leading journals in higher education (e.g. Teaching in Higher Education, Higher Education, British Education Research Journal) as well as leading journals in specialist areas (e.g. Journal of Applied Linguistics, American Journal of Physics, British Journal of Educational Technology). This illustrative sample of journals in which CHED staff publish also points to the multidisciplinary nature of CHED’s collective research output.

With respect to the achievements of 2009, consistent with UCT’s overall pattern, CHED’s level of research output has continued to increase. Highlights for the year include the publication of two special editions in leading international journals which were co-edited by CHED staff and include several papers by UCT authors. In addition to its existing five NRF-rated researchers, 2009 saw the addition of three new NRF-rated researchers. As CHED’s level of research activity and output continues to increase, we are confident that our contributions to ‘research-led’ teaching and learning processes at the University will grow apace, as well as our contributions to the growing international field of higher education studies in its broadest sense.

Associate Professor Nan Yeld
Dean of Higher Education Development
NATIONAL BENCHMARK TESTS CAUSE A STIR

From the moment the results from the pilot National Benchmark Tests (NBT) were announced, they caused a few flutters among universities. After all, the test, conducted with just over 11 500 first-time-entering students at seven South African universities in February 2009, showed that about half would need some sort of academic support if they were to complete their studies. This came as no surprise, however, since several studies have shown that only about half the students entering higher education leave with a qualification. As 2009’s first-year university students are the first graduates from South African schools’ new outcomes-based education (OBE) curriculum, the dots from the NBT results were quickly connected to the OBE’s National Senior Certificate qualification. Perhaps too quickly, suggested Prof Nan Yeld, dean of the Centre for Higher Education and head of the NBT study, who noted that the school system as a whole is still in poor repair. “The NBT, actually, was not meant to say much about what’s happening at schools,” said Yeld. “What it is trying to do is create a uniform set of instruments so that higher education institutions will know more about what they need to do.”

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

CHAPTERS IN BOOKS


ARTICLES IN PEER-REVIEWED JOURNALS


PAXTON, M.J. 2009. “It’s easy to learn when you are using your home language but with English you need to start learning English before you get to the concept” bilingual concept development in an English medium university in South Africa. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 30(4): 345-359.


ARTICLES IN PEER-REVIEWED JOURNALS


PEER-REVIEWED PUBLISHED CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS


STUDENTS DIAL INTO EDUCATION NETWORK

The cellphone, it turns out not surprisingly, is the South African student’s most prized electronic gizmo. This according to a six-year-old study on the access to and use of ICTs for teaching and learning in higher education institutions, conducted by Assoc Prof Laura Czerniewicz, Cheryl Brown and a small team of assistants at UCT’s Centre for Higher Education Development. The project kicked off with a baseline survey among staff and students in the Western Cape in 2004, which showed that the uptake of ICTs was poor. By a second-phase study in 2007, extended to six additional institutions around the country, the situation had improved markedly. Although the research found, it’s the omnipresent cellphone rather than the PC – that could be an economic issue – that rules the technological roost. But mobile or Mac, most ICT use among students is of the no-frills kind, largely for surfing the Internet or writing essays, revealed a more intimate third-phase survey, run in 2009. Only among small pockets of students is ICT used more innovatively. While the study made a point of not naming universities, it divided institutions into two groups. So while Corporate Structured Institutions implemented sufficient policy, they did not encourage innovation or variety of use. On the other hand, the more relaxed Structured Collegial Institutions do inspire innovation, but uptake and technical support are long-term challenges.

CREATIVE WRITING

POEMS PUBLISHED IN ANTHOLOGIES


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