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A WORD FROM THE DEAN

Professor Sakhela Buhlungu
Dean of the Faculty of Humanities

It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to the Faculty of Humanities at UCT. Over the past year, the faculty has had a challenging time, especially within the context of the transformation of higher education across the world. As we begin this new academic year, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all our students, new and returning, to the Faculty of Humanities.

Our students are some of the best and brightest in the country, and we are proud to be part of their academic journey. We are committed to providing them with an education that will equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their future careers.

The Faculty of Humanities is home to a range of departments and centres, each with their own unique focus and expertise. The departments and centres offer a variety of courses that explore different aspects of the human condition, from the past to the present.

One of the key strengths of the Faculty of Humanities is our interdisciplinary approach. We believe that by bringing together different disciplines, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues that shape our world.

The Faculty of Humanities is located on the Upper Campus, a beautiful and historic site that is home to some of the finest buildings in the country. The campus is a place where students and staff can come together to learn, collaborate, and grow.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all our students, staff, and alumni for the important role you play in the success of the Faculty of Humanities. I am looking forward to working with all of you as we continue to shape the future of our institution.

Sakhela Buhlungu
WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?

Story by Judith Browne
Photos by Michael Hammond

What can the human social and sciences and the arts teach us about what it means to be human? Can close self-study help us live better lives?

In search of humanity, human beings are one species among many millions – a species on which the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences shed light in their close study of how human think, communicate, and form groups, and how they engage with the surrounding environment and other species what enable us to be critical, to evaluate things from the space they come from – but it’s made me a lot more respectful.

The storytelling animal

The prefrontal lobes [of the human brain] are the seat of the soul, the intellectual and rational part of the brain. Using tools of our family. Agriculture and animal relationship with other species, but for better computing. Others point another layer to our understanding of the world (and our place in it)?

The seat of the soul Where before, our life was believed to be rooted in the soul (as psychology was originally the study), much of what defines as humans is now believed to reside in the brain. From the neuro-psychological point of view, what makes us human is the relative size of the part of the brain that distinguishes us from other species – and that is due to the prefrontal lobes, the part of the brain that is the seat of the soul.

“From a neuro-psychological point of view, what makes us human is the relative size of the part of the brain that distinguishes us from other species – and that is due to the prefrontal lobes, the part of the brain that is the seat of the soul.”

The prefrontal lobes have two major functions. Firstly, they inhibit outputs from the instinctual-emotional functions. Secondly, they inhibit outputs from the intellectual-emotional functions. In other words, they inhibit outputs from the “instinctual-emotional” and “intellectual-emotional” areas of the brain.

“Still others suggest it’s language what sets us apart as a species. It can teach us, it’s worth questioning our place in it?”

Eruptions in our society in the mining industries and evident in the service delivery strikes may on one level be about material things such as money or facilities. Understand this, though, as much deeper call to witness the human, to be made visible in a tide of negation, degradation and invisibility. Art comes a long way on the enormous, ethical project of making meaning of the world. It is not an afterthought, but central to contemporary culture and making meaning of the world.

“Is this a society where we inherently that notion of human in our minds? Society? Does the division of the human brain between instinct and intellect – a language with which we can still talk about things that aren’t real, different from one another. We can think about thesethings in our mind, but we can’t talk about them in our brain.”

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For Green, the dimensions of our species is born with and how the environment relationships between what we’re thinking and what we’re doing.

“Because it comes down to who you’re related to. What do you question in that literature, it seems to me if you were to survey it and extract systems of violence that depend on the enormous, ethical project of making meaning of the world. It is not an afterthought, but central to contemporary culture and making meaning of the world.”

The work of the humanities in the years ahead is enormous. If we are to survive we need to be reimagining what makes us human. So what is your point to the problems in disturbed earth systems, but working out how to alter the current course requires every field of the humanities.”

Life lessons

Photos by Michael Hammond

What can a degree in the humanities teach you about life? Can it help you become a better person?

Jay Pather

Sociology and social anthropology are very personal. You delve into a lot of other people’s lives – and not necessarily people that you’ve been exposed to. It opens you up... and in that way, you understand people more.

Almon Loe

Humanities (2nd year)

“I’m more aware of this global system of inequality that I’m a part of and I’ve become aware of the experiences of other people, not just my own. Just knowing more helps. It informs my decision-making of the day-to-day. It makes me know I’m not alone in trying to do this. It matters what stories we telling. Because it comes down to who has power to tell these stories. That has a huge effect on how these people are represented: how we see people, and how we treat people.

Reagan Khet-Tu Nokhun

Ancient Chinese history

Mandarin opened up a whole new world. It allowed me to learn from a culture that has been around for thousands of years. Just learning this language you’re able to learn a lot about people that you haven’t been able to communicate with. It taught me that there’s more than one history. There’s more than one story.”

The thing about humanities is... it makes you question everything that you think you know. It opens up your mind to different possibilities. It makes you more tolerant.”

Claim: Azon

English, Afrikaans, history and social anthropology

It’s taught me that so many things are socially constructed. Being in the humanities had taught me to look at things from a new perspective. It still taught me to be critical, to evaluate things from the space that they come from – but it’s made me a lot more respectful.

Andile Dlamini

Politics, Mandarin, African and Chinese history

“The one thing that I have learned is that to think that thinking is the central challenge of our times is central to the human condition. But it’s the possibilities what makes us human. Sciences can point to the problems in disturbed earth systems, but working out how to alter the current course requires every field of the humanities.”

For Green, the dimensions of our species is born with and how the environment relationships between what we’re thinking and what we’re doing. Still others suggest it’s language what sets us apart as a species. It can teach us, it’s worth questioning our place in it?”

“Is this a society where we inherently that notion of human in our minds? Society? Does the division of the human brain between instinct and intellect – a language with which we can still talk about things that aren’t real, different from one another. We can think about these things in our mind, but we can’t talk about them in our brain.”

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THE THERE'S A LARNEY ON MY STOEP!
Curated by Abigail Calata

English might be only one of 11 official national languages, but the diversity of the country’s history and people is coded into its words and expressions. Professor Rajend Mesthrie studies English in its multicultural and multilingual South African context, and has co-authored a book with journalist Jeanne Hromek. "Eish, but is it English?"

 Bunny chow
From the Chinese word for spicy, 'chow' has come to mean food in South Africa. 'Bunny' probably comes from 'bun', the German word for a rye or white bread roll.

 Busy
As in 'busi busy', doing, acting. The use of this word in South African English is probably related to the Afrikaans verb 'bus', meaning 'to be busy'. However, there are parallels in International English, especially in Eastern and Asian areas.

 Dagga
A marijuana-related term. It comes from the Zulu and Xhosa words 'sibudlele', which have the same meaning.

 Gogga
Shag for any living insect. It derives from one or more of the Khoisan languages and is widely used in the Cape. It is also the nickname of a wild-living forest vampire, Paul Adams, for his unorthodox spin actions.

 "He threw me with a stone"
Commonly used in Cape Town, more generally by bilingual people for whom Afrikaans is their first language. It is also the nickname of a former cricketer, Paul Adams, for his unorthodox spin actions.

 Larney
Meaning 'yours', 'yvyn' or 'sterned up', this word is short for 'hilllinden', which in the early 20th century signified an approach taken worn between fashionable European styles and different from the local 'yvyn' or Afrikaans. The word seems to be connected to the intermedian (intermediate) forms 'sard', which is still in usage of Cape Town and Muizenberg.

 Pedi per
The East African word for pepper, signifying food that is hot and spicy.

 Quagga
This original (meaning) word mostly probably comes from a Khoisan word, based on the meaning of the non-extinct subspecies of the plains zebra.

 Robot
The use of this word for a traffic light has long been discontinued in England, but survives in South African English, from whence it has spread through much of Southern Africa.

 Tsetsi
A Pedi word believed to have come from xettisi, an outfit with narrow more pipes tapers toward American genitives in the form 'sardle'. A shirt is a gogga or a 'sardle gogga'.

 REVIVING AN ANCIENT TONGUE

Story by Abigail Calata

The sounds of Khoekhoegowab, not heard for centuries in Cape Town, are reverberating in the Mother City again.

"The revitalisation endeavour takes different forms and varies from person to person, but a large part of it involves educating, persuading and also learning to become more multilingual and multilingual-aware," says Justin Brown, a doctoral fellow at the Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA) and a PhD candidate in linguistics, who is contributing Khoekhoegowab to their language.

"There is no one definitive thing to the original Khoisan language of their ancestors, and we are aiming to recreate and reclaim something that they backed in past and deeply shape us," he explains.

Brown is interacting with members of the Khoi and the Herero Antwerp Group (KAG), a non-profit organisation that, among other things, runs weekly Khoekhoegowab classes at the Cape Town College.

The lessons and other instances of Khoekhoegowab usage are highly performative and take the form of utterances meant to be shared in a group. (hi)stories … Dance helps us as humans to get between those broad public/exterior worlds to begin.

"Through music we can enter and explore a realm that lies beyond our mundane existence, a realm where everything that makes us human—heart and mind and body and soul—can be expressed without the constraints of the three dimensions that imprison us in this world. It is the purest embodiment of the unique enrichment that art can bring to the life of each one of us."

Jo Pither Director of the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts

Khoisan Chief Ineza Wyse says it’s vital to revive Kho- Arica’s unique language, which has not been spoken for centuries in Cape Town, and that it is a form of resistance. (From left) Khoisan Chief Ineza Wyse says it’s vital to revive Kho- Arica’s unique language, which has not been spoken for centuries in Cape Town, and that it is a form of resistance.

DJH Mende Head of Dance

"Dance is a communicative tool from the heart of the body and as such, emanates from a way of living of our collective (hi)stories … Dance helps us as humans to make more sense of our world and each other. It elevates the notion of what shared humanity could look like in the social space, allowing the dialogue between private/interior worlds and public/exterior worlds to begin."

Gerard Samuel Director of the School of Dance

"Essentially the language of art is the metaphor. The way the actor/artist has been, and always will be, a path of insight to personal knowledge, and through the insightful personal knowledge, to reflect and interpret for the world an understanding. We need more than ever before the presence of the actor/artist to help us touch that which is too often beyond our rational comprehension."

"I continue to be inspired by the power of photographs to be suggestive, interpretive, and to travel way beyond the material plane sometimes, as if they were magical. For one who works in the archive I am struck by the extraordinary role photography plays in relation to memory work as we face our traumatic past, deal with the challenges of the present, and imagine a place we call South Africa."

Amajuba Young People's Facility

Eish, but is it English?

More than Words

Language helps us give expression to a multitude of thoughts, experiences and emotions. Yet as versatile as any one language is, all have their limits.

For those times when we literally cannot find the words, art offers us an alternative means of expression. Abigail Calata asked a number of leading UCT minds for their take on how the arts help us express what words cannot.

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A GUIDE TO THE GOOD LIFE?

Story by Yusuf Omar

A life without happiness is not much of a life at all, and the best political systems ensure that their citizens can live a happy life.

So argued the Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Much of the book’s ethical wisdom about happiness, usually summarised as *eudaimonia*, is derived from his attempt to come to terms with the concept of the *good life*. This ideal state is described in the *Republic*: “The very notion of ‘citizen’ at the time of the Athenian philosophers is the most exclusive; South Africa’s Constitution holds all more worthy to participate in some of the noblest forms of popular democracy (honourable mention), but only a few are ever informed of the possibilities of participation.”

Scholars such as UCT Professor Robert Morais, of the Departments of Political Studies and the Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR), read modern democratic systems and political culture as part of the continuing quest to develop a political system that serves everyone.

Knowledge of how these systems work is crucial to creating such truths and to protecting people’s rights, argues Morais: “By developing genuine cognitive awareness of its processes, through direct experience with the fruits of political performance and through rational argument and discourse, an individual can become both a citizen of democracy and a responsible citizen of society.”

Sourced from the University of Cape Town Libraries Special Collections

PHILIPS

Professor David Benatar, head of UCT’s Department of Philosophy, considers what philosophy might contribute to how people can live a good life.

Philosophy is a discipline with timeless subject matter, and only some philosophical questions – such as moral, political and philosophical – are discussed today. For example, questions such as what is the meaning of life are likely to still be asked a hundred years from now, and not just today.

The evident and arguments should – although unfortunately, they often do not – provide the conclusions. In either case, our arguments lead, rather than push us, and allow evidence and arguments to fit some preconceived conclusion.

The way in which this book has been written is also an example of how those working in other areas of philosophy, including metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics, use the language and concepts.

This book is not a guide. It should be that all the philosophical topics about the good life are part of a greater debate about how we live our lives. We think that while some books can be first foren, life can be really good.

One unfortunate fact about the world is that what is true is not always nice, and what is nice is not always true. Even when it is nice, however, the truth at least sometimes worth having.

David Benatar

In an article published in the *New South African Outlook* in January 1999, former student of religious studies at UCT and current Chair of Council Archdeacon Norman Ngambe describes a government’s responsibility to its citizens, and the responsibility that comes with freedom and the ‘good life’. “Government exists for the co-ordination of human life so that the general well-being of humanity may be promoted and a full human life made possible, through guaranteeing to everyone peace, security, freedom, justice and all that enables the ‘good life’. Equally, the freedom to enjoy the ‘good life’ carries obligations.” Quoting the Interaction Council’s Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, he argues that freedom and responsibility are interdependent. “In any society, freedom can never be exercised without limits. The more freedom we enjoy, the more we have to develop them to our fullest capacity. We must move away from the freedom of indifference towards the freedom of involvement.”

The theme of thinking is presented as interchangeable with free speech, and as an argument for the voice of the individual. As momento, philosophy has a right to exist, and a right to be heard.

“Freedom of expression must be seen and heard? Who has a voice? If we decide that social justice is a right and we make the case for freedom of expression, then the same argument in the workplace, the classroom and on the street must follow.”

Carrol Clarkson, former UCT sociologist Melissa Steyn argued that “the Constitution’s role in developing society was less than South Africa’s Constitution holds: all were deemed capable of political systems ensure that their citizens can live a happy life.

One of the main ideas of contemporary political theory, as described by Clarkson, is that authorities and actors should make the case for freedom of expression and the voice of the individual. Clarkson has also made the case for the voice of the individual, and as momento, philosophy has a right to exist, and a right to be heard.

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Carrol Clarkson
On poetic re-imagining

"Post-1990, poetry is gaining momentum. People are trying to imagine the future and what you see post-1990 has been a discussion about the new generation of up-and-coming South African poets. The South African land is formed while looking backwards. The egg is not too symbolic in the future. The idea is that you can't look forward without looking back to see how you got there. And so the new generation of poets, like Karen Press, who came into the 1990s and started writing a lot of poetry, often the black poets of a younger generation. They are also more formally experimental than in the apartheid years. Increasingly, in post-liberation South Africa, poetry can be used as a tool of nation-building. It's used before, but it's gaining momentum. There's a new spirit afoot; many of the new poets..."

On society and empathy

"There's a new spirit afoot; many of the new poets are playing with language, particularly social language. I was working on some of these poems with Helen Swingler. The leitmotifs of colonialism and apartheid are also there. Many [maps] today show the social and racial divisions carved through the roads system. NYI, for example, was Native Yard 1, and it's still etched into the city's maps..."

What do we stand to learn from history? For UCT curator-cum-archivist Renee Meyer, the Sankofa bird, a West African symbol, illustrates what she means when she talks about historical archives "talking back."
EXPANDING THE HUMANITIES

As part of a new master’s level course offered by the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics (AXL), titled ‘Medicine and the Arts’, students in humanities and the health sciences can explore the intersections of their disciplines. Medical anthropologist Dr Susan Levine — who, alongside Health Sciences Professor Steve Reid, is driving the medical humanities and humanities movement — explains: “Each seminar is presented by an artist, a social scientist and a medical practitioner, in discussion with one another in what have been called ‘radical trios’. For example, the session titled ‘The Heart of the Matter: A Matter of the Heart’, had Johan Brits (heart surgeon), Peter Anderson (poet) and a heart recipient in conversation at UCT heart transplant museum at Groote Schuur Hospital, the site of the historic first heart transplant in 1967.”

UCT will play host to a conference on the medical humanities in August 2014, with discussions of an MPhil in the medical humanities currently under way.

Subject to Senate approval, UCT is also set to launch an MPhil specializing in the environmental humanities in 2015 – a collaboration that currently includes academics in science, engineering and the built environment, law, and the humanities (with ‘huddling conversations’ in commerce and health sciences as well).

Environmental humanities course convenor Lesley Green explains why such a degree is important: “At a time when crucial debates about the management of the biosphere and ecological resources are often trapped in a polemic between ‘development’ and ‘the environment’, an initiative in the environmental humanities at the University of Cape Town will offer a space in which to reimagine and reconfigure the terms of the conversation.” As part of this degree, studies encompassing comparative literatures, creative arts, decolonial thought, debates on society and culture – it can also bring new insight to other fields of study. Two good examples of this are the medical and environmental humanities.

When sculpture student Liesl Brenzel dressed the UCT first rugby team in practice jerseys made of lace and felt, she was making a statement about perceptions of masculinity. After the practice session, the team signed a jersey and Brenzel had it box framed, to replicate the traditional aesthetic of rugby memorabilia.

This ‘public intervention’, titled Die Mann, was for a third-year new media elective, ‘Public Practice and Socially Responsive Art: Exploring masculinities and HIV/AIDS’. According to the elective outline, there’s a dearth of knowledge focused on the relationship between HIV, removal treatment and masculinity. Through this work, Brenzel wanted to investigate how these men would be perceived if there was any change to the status quo.

To try to address this knowledge gap and encourage critical discussion and reflection, Michaelis School of Fine Art art lecturer Fabian Saptouw and his students have been working in partnership with UCT’s HIV/AIDS, Inclusivity and Change Unit (HAICU) since 2012, exploring the connection between contemporary constructions of masculinity and HIV through art production and intervention.

“Art is being used in public spaces in an informal and interactive way, making it widely accessible, to engage people about HIV/AIDS,” says Saptouw. “Our students are not standing back from tackling social issues and messages. And this is where art and education intersect, he explains.

“The process gets the students thinking critically about how we understand the role of art. On a small scale these projects are shifting people’s relationship to art as well. Creating an artwork in response to these social issues gives students agency, and they become active participants in the discussion instead of passively absorbing information. They feel they are doing something.”

As the students’ public artworks open up issues around HIV/AIDS, students begin to talk to other students. “And in speaking to their peers, the students become HAICU ambassadors,” notes Saptouw.

Study in the humanities doesn’t just expand understanding of society and culture – it can also bring new insight to other fields of study. Two good examples of this are the medical and environmental humanities.