

There have been widespread demonstrations and conversations emanating from university campuses as South African higher education institutions are forced to grapple with the critical tension of histories based on exclusion and exploitation, and a future that remains uncertain. The post 1994 moment demands of our institutions a social, political and economic transformation the likes of which is evidently yet to occur.

The #RhodesMustFall and subsequently #FeesMustFall student and staff protests challenged and re-energized a critical engagement around the purpose of a university in an unequal society, both as a site of complicity and as a potential agent for social change. The symbolic fall of the statue marked a new era in transforming higher education, and surfaced questions about the role of the decolonisation of spaces, teaching practices, symbols, and the curriculum in conceptualizing alternative developmental paths.

It is the recognition that some of the injustices in our universities are lodged at the heart of our curriculum that made the call for decolonizing the curriculum one of the most persistent demands of the student movement and staff, particularly the Black Academic Caucus (BAC). The University's draft Strategic Plan 2016-2019 commits the University to expanding the scope of transformation. It foregrounds the critical role of curriculum as a driver of change.

A transformative approach, therefore, entails creating an enabling environment within universities for critically reflecting on the politics of the production, application and distribution of knowledge. This includes reflection on what counts as academic excellence in teaching, learning and academic research towards a socially responsive society.

The university is a place where ideas are contested. As such it should respond to the tensions that have surfaced in the post-Apartheid dispensation with new ideas for tackling the critical and urgent issues related to inequality within universities and society more broadly. As part of these debates we need to interrogate the ways in which race, class, gender and (dis)ability interface with our disciplines, and the environment in which we must all collectively teach, learn and live. We should also interrogate the hegemonic Eurocentric influences on global thinking about the content and foundational knowledge of many disciplines.

Our location in Africa means that we need consciously to consider how we integrate different scholarly traditions and perspectives, especially those emanating from Africa and the global south, to enhance our understanding of society. Given the complex nature of the problems facing our society we should consider whether we need to provide opportunities for all students to acquire and develop ways of thinking associated with disciplines beyond their specialised fields of study. The concept of engaged scholarship helps to capture the need for universities to establish channels to engage with members of society, outside of the universities, to enhance the relevance of our curricula and expose students and staff to different ways of understanding the world.

We also highlight the need to expand the footprint of education at UCT to include the communities which have traditionally not been part of the scope of our educational concerns. The CCWG could formulate strategies for addressing these in a manner that will potentially enable access to study at UCT, or other post-school institutions and to determine the most suitable providers. Giving consideration to worker education can potentially lead to creative

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ways of conceptualizing flexible learning pathways to help promote access into UCT for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The pressing nature of the debates surrounding the purpose of the university in an unequal society necessitates re-establishing dialogue to engage with these issues. This can only be achieved meaningfully if the university can create spaces where “winnable” debates can take place to enable change. Openness to change and a willingness to participate in debates in ways that address the challenges of transformation are crucial. Thus all members of the university must make a commitment to participate in the debates and to doing so in ways that address the challenges of transformation. More importantly, the leadership of the institution must be willing to support these dialogues, promote widespread participation, and engage with the outcomes of the inclusive change process in so far as these may impact on faculty and institutional requirements for a programme, degree or major.

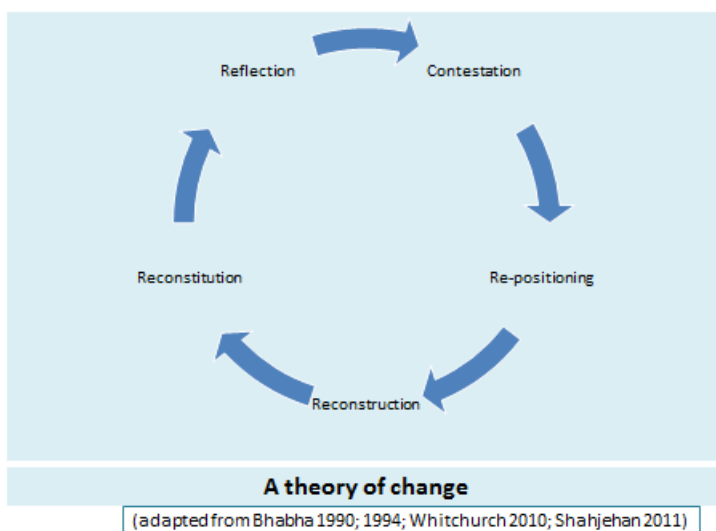
It is important to recognise that a static and rigid academic climate that does not easily allow for alternative perspectives, and is not responsive to society and public debate, is one that actually constrains academic freedom. Hence, the University’s draft new strategic plan commits the University to embracing an ethos which amongst other things will nurture a culture of academic freedom, learning and innovation and unleash the creativity of students, scholars, teachers, professional and support staff.

### **Change Methodology and Core Values**

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We recognise that considerable work on decolonisation of the curriculum is already being done within the University and that there are many lively debates taking place about the changes needed in our curriculum and pedagogy. It is the hope of this working group that more central key points of engagement will be established to provide the mechanisms through which “talk shops” can effect meaningful institution-wide change.

A generative methodology will be adopted. This is guided by a theory of change that includes five iterative and cyclical phases: Contestation, Re-positioning, Reconstruction, Reconstitution and Reflection.



We acknowledge that the UCT community is at various points in transformation/ decolonisation spectrum; there may therefore be many overlaps and blurred boundaries between the different phases. We see this as a robust and generative aspect of our work; our challenge is to provide the conditions for all sections of the UCT community to locate themselves somewhere in the cycle and engage from there.

The process of institution-wide engagement will be kick-started through a set of initial dialogues to identify the key issues and drivers informing curriculum change. Further to this a set of questions to guide critical engagement around assumptions underpinning decisions about the construction of the curriculum, and the nature of changes in the curriculum and pedagogy needed to equip students to grapple with the challenges of post-apartheid South Africa, will be developed.

The Curriculum Change Working Group will work with interested students, staff and community members to co-create the questions and final proposals for the desired changes.