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## **Paperless laboratories for researchers at UCT**

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) eResearch department is being steered in the direction of a paperless tracking solution to researchers across the university. A major part of patenting intellectual property in research is the ability to provide evidence in the form of meticulous record-keeping and verification of the lab activities.

As a result, Professor Barth having received a Tier 1 South African Research Chair in Cancer Biotechnology at the Faculty of Health Sciences is helping UCT transition into this digital solution.

Traditionally this has been a paper-based system. "It's a matter of keeping track of the many lab notebooks written by each student, and storing them safely. But once you have a number of students working on different types of projects, finding the data for a certain experiment in this paperwork becomes a challenge," Barth said.

Barth decided to move his laboratory to UCT from Germany two years ago. His research is centred around the development of recombinant proteins, made from a combination of genetic code from different organisms that can be used in the diagnosis and treatment of disease.

"Here I envisioned a place where the knowledge shared between myself and laboratory members would be contained in a secure, persistent digital repository", he explained. This repository would be able to verify and record – in an unalterable way – the laboratory's activities related to intellectual property, as well as a way to allow laboratory members to share access to the costly software programs they use for interpreting data. Professor Barth's request took the eResearch Unit at UCT by surprise but after extensive research they were able to help make his vision a reality through the use of OneNote, a Microsoft application already freely available to the UCT community under the Microsoft suite site licence.

As it stands, the Barth laboratory has access to a server based at UCT's Information and Communication Technology Services (ICTS) that runs OneNote, as well as other specialised licensed software. They have sufficient storage space that the complete work and documentation for each student can be kept there. They have also set up templates in OneNote for their e-lab notebooks, which are shared via the server.

Although a true paperless laboratory may be a long way off, the technology is available now, and UCT's eResearch unit is helping to pave the way for researchers who are going digital.

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