

# **New initiatives in the Faculty of Humanities**

## **Discussion document on departmental mergers**

At the Faculty Board meeting in March 2011 a proposal will be tabled by the Dean seeking approval for the creation of a new academic unit in the faculty: the **Department of Anthropology, Linguistics and Gender Studies**. This arises as a result of the proposed merger of Social Anthropology, Linguistics, African Gender Institute and the Centre for African Studies.

This initiative emerges as a result of years of discussion within the Faculty. The purpose of this document is to sketch the history leading up to this proposal to form a new department, and set out the terms of the merger proposal. The following chronology presents in broad brush strokes the discussions that have taken place in the faculty between 2005 and the present, largely around the extreme vulnerability of small departments and the responsibility of the faculty to respond to the challenges these pose.

**November 2004:** DAC agreed to set up a task team to consider the viability of small departments in the faculty. Three departments were identified for review: Hebrew and Jewish Studies (3 full time academic staff), CAS (1 full time permanent academic, plus two permanent half posts shared with ELL, that is, the equivalent of 2 full time academic staff)) and the AGI (3 full time academic staff).

**February 2005:** Terms of reference of the review of small departments agreed and approved by DAC.

**September 2005:** The task team reported to the DAC, recommending that all three units be disestablished as academic departments and that the staff and programmes associated with each should be relocated to other academic departments in the faculty. Hebrew and Jewish Studies agreed to this recommendation and the Kaplan Centre, as a focus for Hebrew and Jewish research continues to flourish, with active engagement from staff previously in HJS and now based in REL, SLL and HST. CAS and AGI chose to consider other options. Discussions took place between these two departments to form a merged department, but these did not succeed.

Over the ensuing years the problems identified by the review panel relating to small departments continued to surface, inter alia, the problems of capacity in taking sabbatical leave, problems of diversity in academic offerings, and difficulties in recruiting staff.

**2008 – June 2009:** Professor Amina Mama of the AGI took unpaid leave from the beginning of 2008, and resigned from UCT in March 2009 to take up a post in the USA. Professor Brenda Cooper retired from UCT in June 2009. The vacancies resulting from these departures once again posed the issue of vulnerable small departments in the faculty. The Faculty Staffing Committee took the view that the release of Brenda Cooper's post was contingent on a review of CAS and its future direction.

**September 2009:** The dean, with DAC approval, set up a task team chaired by Professor Francis Njamnjoh to consider the future of CAS. The task team interviewed a significant number of people and produced an interim report in March 2010.

**March 2010:** This interim report put forward a number of scenarios:

1. the creation of a UCT- wide, interfaculty Centre for Contemporary African Scholarship and Research;
2. the closure of CAS and relocation of staff and activities in other departments;
3. growing a new academic department, the Department of Contemporary Continental Research and Scholarship;

4. a federation of CAS, AGI and SAN within a single department;
5. the disestablishment of CAS as an academic department to become a research institute within the Faculty of Humanities;
6. the creation of a School for Contemporary Studies on Africa, also comprising SAN, AGI, and CAS.

The continuation of CAS in its present form as an academic department in the faculty was not supported by the task team. A great deal of excitement was generated around the 6<sup>th</sup> scenario, and it was decided to bring all interested parties (CAS, AGI, SAN, LIN and a number of research units) into intensive discussions facilitated by Vivienne Taylor and Richard Mendelsohn, which took place between April and October 2010.

**April 2010:** DAC and Faculty Board (via a Dean's Circular) formally accepted the proposal that no department should have less than six full time permanent academic members of staff. The following is an extract from the Deans Circular (30.4.2010) which was approved by Faculty Board.

In the six years that have passed since this review [of small departments], the challenges facing small departments have deepened. The problems are now more acute than they were back in 2005, for both intellectual and operational reasons. While enrolments in the rest of the faculty have grown significantly over the past few years, those in CAS have not. The enrolments of the AGI have grown robustly, but the department has experienced difficulties in recruiting staff and there has been significant internal turnover. Taking sabbatical leave, and finding senior staff to serve as HOD, remains a challenge for both departments, and there is evidence that staff in these departments are shouldering leadership and other responsibilities which are unreasonable, and increasingly intolerable.

The Dean now wishes to propose to the Faculty Board that no department in the Faculty should have less than six (6) full time permanent members of staff; and that departments with fewer than 6 members (CAS and AGI) be required to put in place formal arrangements which will overcome their small size by the end of 2010.

The question may well be posed – why 6? Experience has shown us that a department of 6 (Social Anthropology) can provide the critical mass, diversity of expertise and of viewpoint that a robust and vibrant department needs. Having said this, it is true that in recent months the Department of Social Anthropology has experienced significant challenges, with staff taking maternity leave; sabbatical leave; and organising teaching relief to support the PERC project and Sawyer seminar. The department would be more stable, the sharing of the headship easier, and the managing of leave less onerous, if the department were bigger. We have evidence to argue that 6 or more is manageable. Once the number dips below 6, departments face the challenges set out above, and become unsustainable.

**October 2010:** an interim report was submitted to the Dean sketching out the potential for a New School for Critical Enquiry in Africa. Further discussion took place amongst all potential stakeholders, and it was agreed that, as an intermediate step towards the creation of a New School, a Department of Anthropology, Linguistics and Gender Studies would be formed. All existing programmes and courses of AGI, CAS, LIN and SAN would be offered in the new unit and while undergraduate offerings (majors) would in all likelihood remain as is for the time being, considerable interest has been expressed in recrafting postgraduate offerings to draw on expertise across the contributing units.

**February 2011:** proposal will be taken to a faculty forum for initial airing before going as a formal proposal to Faculty Board.

This merger holds great promise for the faculty and is to be warmly welcomed. Anthropology and Linguistics for example, actively desire unity. Close collaboration already exists between colleagues in CAS and in Anthropology, especially centred around Carolyn Hamilton's research chair. The particular identity of the AGI will be protected, as the undergraduate major and postgraduate offerings will continue to be offered, and the research activities of the AGI will be retained in a research entity named the AGI. The issue of a similar structure to hold and highlight the research interests of CAS colleagues has been mooted.

The proposal which will go before faculty board, and which faculty forum is invited to debate, is as follows:

1. to disestablish AGI, CAS and SAN as independent academic departments with effect from 31.12.2011, and relocate LIN away from ELL to join the new department.
2. recognise a new formation, the Department of Anthropology, Linguistics and Gender Studies, comprising staff from SAN, AGI, CAS and LIN, from 1.1.2012. All current offerings by the constituent units will continue to be offered. There will be NO retrenchments. All courses presently offered by members of the units coming together in the new department, will in due course be recoded with a common course code. Distinct streams within the new department will be appropriately named. The new department will have a Head of Department, with section heads leading the distinct streams. The AGI as a research unit will be located in this new department, as will Carolyn Hamilton's research chair in Archive and Public Culture and Raj Mesthrie's research chair in Migration, Language and Social Change. Harry Garuba will retain a split post with ELL, as at present. We will move to release the AC Jordan Chair.
3. Open up a debate within the university about the desirability of a cross faculty platform which can serve to promote engagement with Africa, in much the same way CAS did in its early years.

**Professor Paula Ensor  
Dean of Humanities**

**February 2011**