

New initiatives in the Faculty of Humanities

Revised discussion document on departmental mergers

Earlier this month I circulated a briefing document to the faculty in preparation for the Faculty Forum on 25 February. In keeping with the sentiment often expressed at Faculty Board meetings that documentation should be kept as short and to-the-point as possible, the initial background document was deliberately brief. However, as a result of a number of developments over the past 10 days or so I consider it necessary to provide more background information on the issues at hand. The present document covers the same ground as the initial document, but provides greater detail.

A chronology of events is presented here, which has over time generated a considerable amount of documentation. Some of this documentation has over the years been presented at the DAC, some through Dean's circulars and some at Faculty Board. Any member of the Faculty has access to this documentation. However, some of the documentation that has been produced is internal to the groups that have produced it, and it is not appropriate for me to circulate it, or to make it available without the agreement of those involved in producing it. I hope that this briefing document captures the key issues before us and provides sufficient background information. A great deal of fleshing out will of course happen at the Faculty Forum itself. The Faculty Forum is precisely that – an opportunity for us to air issues of concern to the faculty. It is not a decision-making body and is not bound by the membership rules or time constraints of Faculty Board.

At the Faculty Forum on 25th February the Dean will present for discussion a proposal to create 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 following chronology presents in broad brush strokes the discussions that have taken place between 2005 and the present, emerging initially around the extreme vulnerability of small departments and the responsibility of the faculty to respond to the challenges these pose.

November 2004: The Dean's Advisory Committee (DAC) which comprises all heads of department in the faculty 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**, that the staff and programmes associated with each should be relocated to other academic departments in the faculty, and that the Kaplan Centre, the African Gender Institute and the Centre for African Studies should **continue and maintain their identity as research units**. 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, difficulties in recruiting staff and so forth.

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. Emeritus Professor Brenda Cooper retired from the faculty 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 Emeritus Professor 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 to consider the future of CAS which was chaired by Professor Francis Nyamnjoh and which included inter alia all colleagues from CAS and the AGI. The task team conducted interviews 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 6th 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. These discussions, which at times involved up to 30 members of the academic staff, took place between April and October 2010. Two full workshops of this "New School" group were held in May and in September, and in between these, four working groups were established to develop perspectives for the proposed New School on **Vision and title; Leadership and staffing; Teaching; and Research**

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 by the “New School” group to the dean sketching out the potential for a **New School for Critical Enquiry in Africa**. The report explained the background to the proposal in the following terms:

The initiative around the New School takes place in a complex, emergent institutional landscape. Like institutions and faculties of Humanities elsewhere, the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town faces a number of significant challenges. These include the primacy of the sciences, a contracting funding environment, the need to diversify the student and faculty composition, the ongoing pursuit of excellence and innovation in teaching and research, and the fostering of forms of social responsiveness and public engagement. These challenges are being addressed by a variety of initiatives across the Faculty of Humanities at UCT. The New School will add its own weight to these initiatives.

This emergent landscape is also one of opportunities. Emergent intellectual projects and initiatives include the development of new Humanities institutes and centres in the region, a set of discussions around theory from the South, a growing interest in South-South collaborations and networks, and a palpable tilting away from established disciplinary metropolises, towards a Brazil/India/China/South Africa axis.

At the same time, in quite specific ways, many of the disciplines and departments in the New School initiative bring legacies of entanglement in historical contexts of colonialism and apartheid. Some have been flashpoints in the institutions own history, and have raised critical questions around the relationship between power and knowledge, academy and society.

The New School initiative is an attempt explicitly to address these various contexts, and to weave together strands of necessity, opportunity, and scholarly enquiry. In the first place, this involves taking seriously a notion of critique. In the second place, it involves seriously our own location in post apartheid society, in Africa, and in the global south.

The naming and principles of the New School are the result of close discussion and a carefully worked compromise (for example: the notion of “critical enquiry” in the title, the conceptual/geographical locator “Africa”, and the prepositional form “in”). We recognize that there are many other entities in the Faculty of Humanities involved in critical enquiry in/on Africa. At the same time, we feel that

there are significant benefits to naming and framing a project around “critical enquiry in Africa” in the context of a single institutional site. Part of our argument is that our own disciplinary histories point us ineluctably in this direction.

The New School initiative seeks to find a position of institutional strength founded on a shared academic project that enables us to take up these various challenges in ways that are intellectually powerful and innovative, and institutionally efficient. The combination of a New School and the Institute for the Humanities in Africa presents an opportunity for a significant development in the Faculty’s profile, positioning and capacities within the university, as well as nationally and internationally.

An extract from the vision statement developed by the group reads as follows:

Key to its intellectual project is the conception of the New School as a space in which we negotiate the legacies of the knowledges that we have inherited. These are knowledges in and of Africa, but they are also knowledges which place us in relation to a conception of the disciplines, as a notion of global scholarship and global theory. Part of our aim, framed as a question, is to ask: what would it take to create knowledges capable of moving African-centred scholarship into the dialogic centre of global paradigms of humanities research? The new School sets out to be a research and teaching hub, a world leading institution of its kind, able to attract top students and significant research funding.

The draft vision statement went on to say that to achieve this, the New School would be guided by five main principles: **Locating ourselves, locating theory;** [taking seriously the way in which we are located, as scholars in post apartheid South Africa in Africa, and in the global south] **Working in and out of disciplines; re-inhabiting the global; practising theory/theorising practice; and working together, working in new ways.**

Further discussion took place amongst all potential stakeholders (that is, including CAS and the AGI), and it was decided that, as an intermediate step towards the creation of a New School, a Department of Anthropology, Linguistics and Gender Studies should be formed. The intention is that all existing programmes and courses of AGI, CAS, LIN and SAN would be offered in the new unit and while undergraduate offerings (majors) are expected to remain “as is” for the time being, considerable interest has been expressed in moving fairly rapidly to recraft postgraduate offerings in order to draw on expertise across the contributing units. Close collaboration already exists between colleagues in CAS and in Anthropology, especially centred around the Archive research chair. Anthropology and Linguistics actively desire unity. The particular identity of CAS and the AGI would be protected, as the undergraduate and postgraduate offerings would continue to be offered, and the research activities of the AGI would 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 and CAS colleagues agreed to take this forward.

It is important for faculty to recognise that this proposal emerged after months and months of intense discussion **by the stakeholders themselves**, and the proposal which is to be discussed by Faculty Forum was agreed to by them.

21 February: I made the second of two public statements on the proposed merger. An extract from the second statement reads as follows:

Over the past year, a group of approximately 30 academics in the Faculty of Humanities at UCT have been discussing the creation of a new department which, if it were to be born, would lift African studies at UCT to a significantly higher level. This group of academics, from the Centre for Africa Studies, the African Gender Institute, Linguistics, Anthropology

and Sociology, included three NRF research chairs, a number of highly esteemed professors and leaders of major research projects. The discussions were wide-ranging and intense, and provoked such excitement that academics from other departments asked to be included. In time the group came up with a proposal to form a new department to be called the New School for Critical Enquiry in Africa. If this School were to be born, it would be the second largest in the faculty, and would draw together cutting edge research and teaching about epistemologies and representations of Africa, heritage and public culture, archive studies, language and migration, indigenous knowledge systems, feminism and violence, land reform and democracy, and much more. It would lay the basis for an extraordinary flowering of intellectual work, and lift the academic game of the faculty to an entirely new level.

25 February 2011: Proposal will be tabled at a faculty forum for initial airing before going as a formal proposal to Faculty Board.

The Faculty Forum is invited to debate the following proposal:

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. To recognise a new formation, the Department of Anthropology, Linguistics and Gender Studies, comprising staff from SAN, AGI, CAS and LIN, from 1.1.2012, as a step towards the creation of the New School. 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 as a step towards creating the New School.
3. To open up a debate within the university about the desirability of a cross faculty platform which can serve to promote engagement with Africa across UCT as a whole, in much the same way CAS did in its early years.

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