

UCT launches course for SA school leaders

Issued by [UCT Graduate School of Business](#)

6 Jun 2008

The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) will this month launch a course that will provide South African school leaders with valuable business acumen and enhance their leadership capacity.



Mark Mitchell, Business Acumen for Educational Leaders course director.

The new programme, called Business Acumen for Educational Leaders, harnesses the business school's highly rated management development expertise and has been designed for educationalists to develop their ability to create and deliver value in the critically important area of education management.

The course, which runs over two modules from 30 June - 3 July and 1 - 3 October, is for educationalists who are first time principals, vice-principals, heads of departments, or teachers with four or more years experience who are eager to enhance their core management skills.

According to course director Mark Mitchell, educationalists have been tasked with driving one of the most important processes for social and economic upliftment - the education of South Africa's children.

"Much progress has been made to address past imbalances and open the doors to education to millions more South African children, but it is much publicised that all is not well in the hallways of South African schools - numerous challenges exist for educationalists," said Mitchell.

Mitchell said that one area that has not been focussed on significantly to date and which could make the biggest positive impact is the nurturing and maximising of talent at the top level of management within schools.

"Research globally is showing that effective leaders are a key part of learner achievement in schools," he said.

The new UCT GSB course infuses concepts that are synonymous with business executive development into a landmark programme for educationalists.

Mitchell said there are remarkable similarities between the environments in which today's business leaders and education leaders operate in.

"Executives and educationalists are both challenged today to steer their organisations in increasingly complex landscape fraught with pressure and the need to meet a range of stakeholder needs. In both environments self-management and the ability to manage others well is critical to success.

“Equally important is a high degree of innovation and creative strategic thinking, financial competency and the ability to adapt to the needs of the unique environment within which the organisation or institution is located,” he said.

“While there are these many similarities, there has to date however been little infusion of business leadership concepts into the mainstream of educational leadership.”

Drawing on the practices of the business school, the new course has been tailored to address several key competency areas, including: managing strategic planning in an educational environment; developing a deeper understanding of what motivates people; developing skills in negotiation and conflict management; managing the annual budgetary process; understanding marketing within an educational environment; and gaining confidence in successful implementation and contributing to executive committees.

“School principals can refine their leadership and management skills and revitalise their personal vision of leadership,” said Mitchell.

“Perhaps the first step to unearthing new visionaries in education is to look at addressing the mindset of educationalists, unlocking their potential to shine as leaders. A skills and knowledge transfer from business leadership to education leadership offers a tried and tested model for this and could have a profound impact on South Africa's schools,” he added.

Associate Professor Chris Breen of UCT's School of Education, and one of the faculty members on the new programme, agreed that educationalists can unlock a world of new possibilities.

“If one looks at business schools for example, recent years have seen a boom in new ideas in executive development - this has been fuelled by the growing demands on business leaders to be creative and achieve results under increasing pressure.

“What underpins the successful new techniques is that they go deeper than the logical paradigm of processes and procedures, down to the heart of what makes a leader tick - self-knowledge and the internal workings of leaders are the focus of many leadership programmes and have proven to unlock tremendous organisational performance,” he said.

The course is being run by the UCT GSB's Executive Education unit, which has a global top ten rating from the Economist Intelligence Unit, and was listed in 2007 by the International University Consortium for Executive Education (UNICON) - the leading global body for the advancement of executive education - as one of six leading business school innovators.

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