UCT Digital Bootcamp gives incompletes a second chance

By Shan Radcliffe

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The University of Cape Town in partnership with Umuzi, an NGO that assists with digital training and employment opportunities for youth, officially launched the UCT Digital Bootcamp on Wednesday, 22 June 2022.

Image source: Kampus Production from Pexels

The project aims to provide a second chance to students who were unable to complete their degree with the institution, as well as to digitally upskill currently unemployed graduates.

"A study that was conducted in 2019 revealed that 78% of university students could not complete their three-year degrees in the allotted time. More than half did not complete their degree even after six years," said UCT Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng at the UCT Digital Bootcamp launch event.

Quoting higher education minister Blade Nzimande, Phakeng pointed out that statistics show that only 12% of students who enter Grade 1 will eventually go on to access South Africa's university system; and only half of those will actually graduate. However, despite having earned a degree, 15% of graduates are still unemployed.

Phakeng said that while UCT's dropout rate of 10% is significantly lower than the country's 50% average, they are not happy with that figure as it means every year, 10% of UCT students suffer some kind of disruption that derails their studies. This is more often due to circumstances beyond their control, rather than a lack of trying.

It is for these students that the UCT Digital Bootcamp has been developed.

Getting back on the career track

As part of the project's pilot programme, 100 young people whose UCT studies have been interrupted or who have been unemployed for three years or more, will be offered the opportunity for digital skills training, which may take them in a different direction from their original career goals. Training is sponsored by Amazon, Google and Meta (previously Facebook).

"An interruption does not mean the end," stressed Andrew Levy, co-founder and MD of Umuzi. "There's a myriad of reasons why people are interrupted, be it life, be it financial, be it personal - emotional wellness - and what we need to do is support these young people who have the talent and aptitude to make a success of themselves. We need to provide as much access as possible to these young people so that they can enable their own potential. Through that we can build a new generation of social capital.

"The challenge of South Africa, 25 years later, is that we still have the 'haves' and the 'have nots', and we have no bridges to cross this inequality and divide. Education and skills are the way in which to build and to change that. We need to build a generation of young people who feel positive and confident within themselves and have the access and opportunities to enable that potential, and then to support others." Interrupted students, Levy believes, are the key to bridging this gap.

A new solution to disruption

The pilot programme is based on two important premises. The first is the belief in the potential of every UCT student to make a positive contribution to the future of South Africa. This includes students who face the disappointment of having to interrupt their university education, for whatever reason. As learnt from the pandemic, disruptions can point the way to new solutions and opportunities.

"For this reason, the UCT Digital Bootcamp offers sponsored training to eligible UCT interrupted-studies students or UCT graduates who have not been able to find a job since graduating three or more years ago. This, so they can increase their chances of finding work or creating their own entrepreneurial opportunities. No previous digital experience or skills are required," said Phakeng.

Application process

Pre-selected candidates are already being sent invites to apply for one of the first 100 available places. All candidates will be required to complete an application form and an aptitude test. Phakeng stressed the importance of taking the aptitude test seriously as it will be the deciding factor for acceptance into the programme.

Other students interested in applying for the initiative can view more information and access the application form here: http://www.uct.ac.za/main/explore-uct/strategic-initiatives/uct-digital-bootcamp

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