

UCT's latest massive open online course catalysing social change

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Become a changemaker, in your community through UCT's latest free online course.

Creating a safer space for our children, a more inclusive society or increasing access to quality education, are things many of us wish we could achieve but just don't know where to start. With drugs and gangsterism plaguing many communities on the Cape Flats, resident Marlon Parker decided to take on the challenge. He founded the [Reconstructed Living Lab \(RLabs\)](#): A social movement 'born-and-bred' in Bridgetown, Cape Town which is now active in 22 countries. RLabs empowers youth through innovative and disruptive technology by teaching them vital skills and providing much needed support and a sense of community.

Advocating and supporting initiatives such as RLabs forms part of the [Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#)'s mandate. The Bertha Centre is a specialised unit at [UCT's Graduate School of Business](#), and is the first academic centre in Africa dedicated to advancing social innovation and entrepreneurship.

This July the University of Cape Town (UCT) through [UCT's Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching \(UCT CILT\)](#) launched its sixth free Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), [Becoming a changemaker: Introduction to Social Innovation](#). The six week course was co-created between the Bertha Centre and RLabs, and is designed to debunk common assumptions around what resources are needed, as well as to encourage people to begin acting as social innovators and changemakers. Participants will follow the journey of RLabs and other examples of social innovations in Africa and all over the world. They will be challenged to get out of their comfort zones, to start engaging in and with the diverse spaces, people, challenges and opportunities around them.

MOOCs are free online courses and have no entry requirements. Anyone with an internet connection can take part. "While internet access is increasing, data costs still remain high, especially in South Africa. Therefore RLabs U will be taking the new MOOC 'offline' to deliver it in communities, halls, homes, schools. "As RLabs we are really excited to partner with the Bertha Centre who have been pioneering work and research in Social Innovation. This collaboration also enables us to fulfill a broader mandate to see more changemakers driving social change globally," said Marlon Parker.

"We are excited about pioneering a new kind of MOOC that will reach deeper into communities. It will also advance access to quality education in order to catalyse social change," said Francois Bonnici.

In early 2015 UCT became the first African university to offer MOOCs on international MOOC platforms thereby joining many leading international universities. Through [Coursera](#), the world's largest MOOC platform, and [FutureLearn](#) (a smaller British-based platform) UCT is reaching thousands of learners worldwide.

While access to quality tertiary institutions is a challenge globally, online distance learning has become increasingly popular amongst a range of individuals looking to upskill themselves. Many formal online courses, however, have high costs creating a further barrier to accessing learning opportunities. This is especially why UCT decided to start offering MOOCs.

Commenting on UCT's decision to launch MOOCs Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sandra Klopper explained, "In developing UCT's MOOC strategy, we have been mindful of the scarcity of contributing universities from the Global South, and from Africa in particular. We believe there is an opportunity to share knowledge generated from our leading academics and researchers, and to showcase the university's rich array of intellectual and teaching resources."

The goals of the UCT MOOCs project include making UCT knowledge resources globally accessible; giving exposure to

African content and knowledge, supporting students in academic transitions and developing models and expertise in online learning that could be deployed in mainstream degree programmes.

While [UCT MOOCs](#) are offered to the general public, many are designed for a specific audience. For example, [Education for All: Disability, Diversity and Inclusion](#) attracts and assists teachers and other stakeholders involved in education to address barriers to learning and participation and to enable transformation of school communities to allow them to really benefit from inclusion.

Although MOOCs are often non-credit bearing courses, they can provide valuable skills to professionals as well as more general interest learners. For example, during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Western Africa, MOOCs, that could be accessed via cellphones, were used to educate ordinary citizens about the symptoms and how to avoid Ebola. Even healthcare professionals used MOOCs to train their staff.

This latest UCT MOOC invites everyone on the journey to become a changemaker.

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