

Stellenbosch University prioritises climate crisis with launch of School for Climate Studies

By  Sindy Peters

30 Jul 2021

Stellenbosch University (SU) launched its School for Climate Studies on Thursday, 29 July - the first school of its kind in the country that has the status of a faculty, highlighting the impetus of its establishment in battling the climate crisis.



Speakers at the virtual launch included Professor Wim de Villiers, rector and vice-chancellor of SU; deputy minister of higher education, science and technology Buti Manamela; and Professor Guy Midgley of SU's Department of Botany and Zoology.

Prioritising climate studies, climate change

"Contextualising the need for research on climate within the framework of our institution of Stellenbosch University's Vision 2040 is really not a difficult task, said De Villiers. "Our Vision 2040 by its very definition aims to gaze into the future, but actually all future scenarios we can possibly imagine may actually be moot if climate studies and climate change are not at the top of our agendas."

"The School of Climate Studies will have a broad mandate to work across all faculties, centres and institutes at Stellenbosch University, as well as with other national and international higher education institutions, and public and private enterprises because that's the way we need to go in order to disrupt these silos that often stand in the way of us addressing these complex issues and problems that Jim Collins has called the 'big, hairy, audacious goals' that we need to set ourselves in solving," said De Villiers.



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The vision for the school is to:

- be a world-class institution for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary climate and related studies in and for Africa;
- support and encourage research partnerships both nationally and internationally; and
- work across all academic entities at SU, national and international higher education institutions, and public and private enterprises.

"There is general agreement that in Southern Africa we urgently need expertise, knowledge and innovation to better understand and adapt to the complex results of worsening climate events. This knowledge is also needed to support our negotiators in international multilateral conventions to ensure that our interests are well represented and supported by a credible evidence base," said Manamela.

"The school we are launching here today will give impetus to [our] focus on climate change - an increased landscape of institutions providing specialised training and capabilities which the country needs in order to deal with the negative impacts of climate change and develop necessary adaptation mechanisms."



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The core activities of the school will include:

- Research and development;
- Teaching and learning;
- Collaboration, capacity building and consultancy; and
- Commercialisation and social impact.

Speaking on how we need to sustainably integrate our economic and environmental systems, Midgley said, "For some reason we give priority to the economic system. There's a common thought that human wellbeing lies in economic wellbeing, and thus the economic system in the world gets priority. This has led to, in some senses, the strip mining of the world's ecological system to support the economic system because it's beneficial to people. But, in fact, people are part of the living system... and we should reset the balance between these two systems."

"We've got to find a better way of allowing feedback information from our economic system to better inform risks going forward," said Midgley,

Watch the virtual launch:

For more information on the SU School for Climate Studies, click [here](#).

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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