

UCT business school gives leaders tools for tough times

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To help senior business leaders get to grips with local and global business challenges and find innovative ways of creating value during hard times, the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is offering its Executive Leadership Programme (ELP) this August.



Elspeth Donovan, Programme Director of ELP, said that 2008 has been characterised by “one kind of crisis after another” - all of which have left business leaders feeling unsure of what the future holds.

“This year business has already been hit hard. Economic growth in South Africa has slowed down to a six year low of just 2.1% during the first quarter - lower than was generally expected - which has left many with major doubts over the country's ability to cope with difficulties like the global credit crunch, rising fuel and food prices and the cost and availability of energy,” said Donovan.

“These crises all feed in to a bigger global economic picture - one in which the key challenges in the years ahead will stem primarily from environmental issues, depleting resources and the growing gap between the rich and poor.”

The course, which takes place from 24 August - 6 September, aims to develop critical skills in thinking, decision making and interpretation in order to help delegates contend with the difficulties that lie ahead.

To this end it will feature experts from within the GSB's faculty as well as international faculty and guest speakers, including: Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Director of the South African Institute of International Affairs; Jonathon Hanks, Founding Director of climate change consultancy Incite Sustainability and Christophe Gillet, former Director of Business Innovation for Sony Business Europe; amongst others.

Donovan explained that the course will be split into two defined sections - with the first week focusing on “the big picture”, which will include an evaluation of the state of the planet, the state of the African continent and the state of the global economy, and the second week focusing on finding innovative solutions and strategies for co-creating value in the future.

“The pace of change today is so fast that one can no longer be certain of what the future holds. This is very disconcerting for senior business leaders who can no longer operate in the same way that they did a decade ago. The key leadership challenge in the current business climate requires learning how to deal with complexity and how to adapt to change - this is what we hope to expose the delegates to over the two week course,” said Donovan.

Another crucial factor for success is co-creating value through innovation and the programme is thus dedicating an entire day to a ‘Think Indaba’ under the theme ‘Designing our Future’. Delegates at the indaba will be challenged to find solutions that serve the ecology while still making good business sense - a new brand of capitalism termed ‘Ecovation’.

The ELP programme will also include a component on executive wellness and the practice of mindfulness to help leaders avoid burnout. According to Donovan, the importance of being able to step-back and reflect should not be underestimated -

taking time to think with a “clear” mind is essential for business leaders.

Furthermore, the programme will emphasise that business needs to assume more responsibility for the problems it has helped create - government and civil society cannot be left to grapple with pressing global issues alone.

The course is being offered 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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