

Partnering Across Continents & Cultures to Propel Research

Jeremy Miner and CPUT
Engineering Faculty
Participants in a Persuasive
Proposal Writing Workshop

By Jeremy T. Miner and Tembeka Mpako-Ntusi



It is axiomatic that research is becoming an increasingly global endeavour. As such, two professional development organizations, NCURA and SARIMA (Southern African Research & Innovation Management Association), partnered on an International Fellows program designed to propel research through mutual learning and knowledge exchange.

In March 2014, Tembeka Mpako-Ntusi, former National President of SARIMA and director of the research directorate at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), hosted Jeremy Miner, NCURA Region IV Chair and director of grants and contracts at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UWEC), for two weeks at the campuses in Cape Town and Bellville, South Africa. CPUT and UWEC are primarily undergraduate institutions, with 95% of their respective student bodies pursuing baccalaureate degrees, and have education at the

“The future depends on man’s being able to transcend the limits of individual cultures.”

– Edward T. Hall

Jeremy Miner and
Tembeka Mpako-Ntusi
at Cape Peninsula
University of Technology



core of their academic missions. Though CPUT has nearly three times the total number of students as UWEC, it has less than twice the number of faculty.

CPUT and UWEC share common origins and trajectories: both were historically teaching institutions that are becoming more research focused universities. Accordingly, the fellowship explored barriers that limit research and scholarship and considered additional support that would help advance research and scholarship activities. Individual and small group meetings occurred with researchers, staff, graduate students, and more than two dozen administrators, ranging from the vice chancellor, deputy vice chancellor for research, technology and innovation, engineering dean, and research coordinator for education and social sciences to members of the technology transfer office and international affairs office to directors of research centers and units.

In these discussions, there was wide acknowledgement that CPUT's vision for research, technology and innovation is grounded in its 10 year blueprint: "To unlock the potential of staff, students and partners to excel in research, technology and innovation that offer solutions to the needs of society."

Two additional themes emerged, identifying a barrier and a support, respectively, that would be of value to researchers: time and capacity development in grants.

From North America to South Africa, universal agreement exists that "time" is a precious commodity, one that always seems to be in short supply. Tembeka serves on a committee called "Faculty Workload Model Task Team" whose charge it is to identify ways to create protected time for research and scholarship and some initial approaches were shared. In essence, opportunities for more effective time management exist at two levels:

- *Individual:* set priorities daily, recall long-term goals while doing small tasks, block schedule self-identified "most productive times of the day," find places away from interruptions to work, organize work environments for success, chunk up researching and writing processes into manageable units, and find a mentor.
- *Institutional:* redesign courses to be less lecture driven, revise course assignments to be less grading-intensive, consider class project due dates in relationship to research and scholarship activities and deadlines, examine course sizes to redistribute work-

NCURA Region IV Cow Mascot
at Robben Island Museum





NCURA Region IV Cow Mascot at Table Mountain



NCURA Region IV Cow Mascot at CPUT

loads, reduce committee activity and graduate student supervision, and establish an internal program that supports course reassignments.

To promote capacity development of researchers and graduate students, Jeremy presented two 2-hour workshops on persuasive proposal writing. One workshop was offered on the Cape Town campus and was attended by 30 individuals who were currently supported by internal grant funding. The other workshop was held on the Bellville campus and was attended by 30 individuals in the engineering faculty. These priority audiences were targeted because the grants information being presented was directly relevant and held great potential for immediate application, internally and externally.

The workshops explored common reasons why grant applications fail as well as insider secrets for grant success. Ensuing discussions examined ways to identify partners for collaborative grant-seeking endeavors and even considered how the implementation of electronic routing systems would ease the administrative burden on researchers, thus allowing more time for research and scholarship writing. The workshops made an impact: In the words of one researcher, “Thank you for the insightful presentation of writing persuasive grant applications. It was fascinating to see how transparent the US system was with respect to access to information. I believe there is a lot we can learn from this side of the world.”

Celebrating success was identified as a critical strategy for promoting research and scholarly activity and Tembeka and Jeremy shared their respective approaches. The annual CPUT “Research Day” occurs in November and showcases research activities of researchers and graduate students through poster displays and oral presentations. External adjudicators select the top three from approximately 80 posters for prizes. Additional research awards are given in the areas of research publications, graduate supervision, and industry funding; each award includes a finan-

cial incentive that can be used to stimulate future research. The annual UWEC “Celebration of Excellence in Research and Creative Activity” event occurs over two days in May and showcases the scholarly work of undergraduate-student faculty collaborations through posters, presentations, displays and performances. A closing reception acknowledges the intellectual contributions of all 380 collaborative research projects and recognizes undergraduate students who received prominent national and institutional scholarships.

It’s impossible to visit the “Mother City,” as Cape Town is called, without savoring some of the culture it has to offer. In addition to appearing at CPUT in the historic District Six area, the NCURA Region IV cow mascot was seen at Table Mountain, scaling one of the new seven wonders of nature, and at Robben Island, following in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela’s long walk to freedom. More broadly, by taking a world view, understanding grant-seeking behaviors through appropriate cultural lenses and contexts, research administrators together can contribute to advances in research activity and awards. ■



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