

CSIR and Stellenbosch University launch new research chairs

Stellenbosch University (SU) and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) launched two new Research Chairs – one in Quantum, Optical and Atomic Physics and one in Artificial Intelligence – at Lanzerac Hotel in Stellenbosch on Monday (20 July 2015). The launch was held as part of a SU/CSIR research seminar that focused on particular areas where expertise exist at both institutions.

The Faculty of Science will host the Chair in Quantum, Optical and Atomic Physics, while the Department of Information Science in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences will be home to the Chair in Artificial Intelligence. Dr Hermann Uys, a physicist at the CSIR and SU, and Prof Arina Britz, CSIR Centre for Artificial Intelligence Research (CAIR) representative at its SU node, will be the holders of the respective chairs.

Prof Eugene Cloete, Vice-Rector: Research and Innovation at SU, described the launch as a celebration of SU's relationship with the CSIR, while Dr Rachel Chikwamba, CSIR Group Executive: Strategic Alliances and Communication, said "the launch of two research chairs is absolutely amazing." She thanked SU for the partnership and said the CSIR will not be able to solve everyday problems and develop new knowledge without the support of universities.

Referring specifically to the Chair in Quantum, Optical and Atomic Physics, Prof Louise Warnich, Dean of the Faculty of Science at SU, said the launch "is quite a moment for the Faculty of Science, the Department of Physics and SU. In five years' time we will look back and be quite amazed of what has come of this research chair."

The Chair in Quantum, Optical and Atomic Physics will allow researchers to focus on the use of single trapped atomic ions for studying quantum phenomena, and on developing laboratory technologies for the field of research that can be commercialized.

Highlighting the benefits of the Chair in Artificial Intelligence for SU and the CSIR, Prof Bruce Watson, Chairperson of the Department of Information Science, said it would double the department's research capacity and allow for the allocation of bursaries to undergraduate and postgraduate students.

"It would make it possible to bring more artificial intelligence research into our courses and would also create a student pipeline for the CSIR in the sense that students may one day work with or for the CSIR."

Watson said artificial intelligence is one of the very interesting research areas and could find application in defense, service delivery, and information and communications technology.

Stellenbosch University is one of the partner institutions of CAIR, a national

collaborative research network that originated in 2011 as a joint initiative between the CSIR and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Stellenbosch University has an active memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place with the CSIR. This MOU provides a framework for the establishment of strategic cooperative project-specific agreements, and for collaboration in selected areas of research, development and administrative initiatives. It lends itself to collaborative research activities, staff development and the relevant sharing of facilities and other resources.

- For more information on the MOU with the CSIR, please contact Maryke Hunter-Hüsselmann of the Division for Research Development at mh3@sun.ac.za.