

## **CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAPABILITIES RESEARCH (CHECaR)**

### **Funding for PhD and Post-Doctoral Fellows from 2013/14**

**\*\* All doctoral and post-doctoral opportunities are open to South African applicants and to those from outside South Africa.**

A new higher education research centre and research programme has been established at the University of the Free State, led by Professor Melanie Walker, who holds a funded South African Research Chair (SARCHI ) in higher education and human development.

The research programme under her leadership is an opportunity to understand the impact of higher education in contributing to reducing inequalities and to the broader public good from an inter-disciplinary, comparative, multi-project perspective. Informed by the lens of human development and capabilities as conceptualised by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, universities, development and social justice are evaluated based on the extent to which 'capabilities' are created both for diverse individuals and to building a society that values creating capabilities for all. The research programme therefore investigates how the widest capabilities and functionings can be formed directly and indirectly in and through higher education. Building systematically on relevant higher research to date, the programme develops theory, generates new empirical narratives, and fosters beneficial linkages between researchers and diverse publics, including practitioners, policy makers and other potential users of the research.

#### **CHECaR RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- (i) To interrogate the role of higher education in human development and equity in order to promote social justice;
- (ii) To generate a research-based understanding of higher education and its contributions to the human development of diverse graduates and to improving society. This includes how higher education can contribute to the capability for work, while at the same time contributing to social citizenship;
- (iii) To increase our understanding of transformative practices and policies, of inclusive educational processes, and equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students.

#### **CURRENT RESEARCH THEMES AND THEME PROJECTS**

##### **1. THEME: STUDENT TRAJECTORIES AND DIVERSITY**

###### **Research project: Gender, empowerment & agency in higher education**

The project is – broadly speaking – interested in a capabilities metric of gender justice and specifically, the relationship between higher education and diverse women's agency over time. The project therefore asks : 1) Under what conditions does higher education empower women and advance their personal and collective agency? 2) What are diverse women able to be and to do, over time? 3) What do their biographies show about

relevant conversion factors and social arrangements in relation to their empowerment and agency? 4) What do their narratives tell us about how 'gender just' South Africa is? 5) How can an evidence-informed gender sensitisation workshop programme enhance women's empowerment and agency?

## **2. THEME: CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### **Research project: Pedagogic in/equalities of race and gender in undergraduate social science in two universities**

The project aims to theorise the quality of university and pedagogy for first degree courses so that attention is paid to social inclusion and justice and specifically to intersections of gender, race and social class. An investigation into what is taught, why and how will be undertaken in undergraduate social science/humanities departments in at least two different universities. The research will consider how structural characteristics of gender, race and social class play out in curriculum and pedagogic processes in different university settings for diverse students and will seek to connect micro analysis of classroom and students with macro analysis of how they express distributive injustices in society. There is an overall concern with socially just pedagogic quality.

## **3. THEME: 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY UNIVERSITIES AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT**

### **i) Research project: The capability for work**

The project examines Universities, employability and inclusive development. CHECaR is a partner in a project funded by the British Council for three years (2013-2015) to investigate the challenges and opportunities facing universities in linking higher education, economic opportunities and employability, and social development. There are five countries in the study: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and the UK (lead partner). The overarching research question is: 'Given the increasing global importance attached to employability, how are universities in the five countries contributing to the preparation of graduates for work and participation in society, with what outcomes and why?' The project has three cross-cutting themes: 1) Quality and relevance; 2) Finance, governance & management; 3) Research, innovation and research training.

### **ii) Research project: Governance**

This new project is interested in governance arrangements in South African higher education, but especially in student governance and the contribution to understanding transformation of institutions and persons and how student governance responds to and adapts to governance challenges. In particular it asks what student governance contributes to building an inclusive campus and equality in student capabilities. What are the opportunities? What variation is there across different universities and historically? How can student governance be educative?

## **RESEARCH CAPACITY BUILDING**

Early career researcher development is an important feature of the research centre, including:

- one on one supervision,
- critical reading groups,
- methodology and research skills development,

- writing development,
- expert researcher seminars, and
- student presentations and graduate conferences.

There is currently a cohort of 5 PhD, 4 Masters, and 3 post-doctoral researchers, plus Professor Walker in CHECaR.

An international network of colleagues also contributes to the research projects. Doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows will have opportunities to attend national and international conferences and engage on a regular basis with national and international scholars on attachments to CHECaR.

## PHD STUDENTS

From 2014, four to six new PhD students will be recruited, each of whom must submit a project proposal linked to one of the three big research themes above: (i) student trajectories and diversity; (ii) curriculum, pedagogy and social justice; (iii) 21<sup>ST</sup> century universities and inclusive development

### PHD PROFILE (FULL-TIME ONLY)

We are looking for highly motivated individuals with an upper second grade (or equivalent) M.A/M.Sc. (or equivalent degree), with a strong interest in higher education research and social justice. Research experience in this topic is an advantage. Fluency in spoken and written English is required. Candidates should be able to work independently and in a team. Applicants must be eligible for doctoral studies at the UFS and be eligible for a study visa if from outside South Africa. PhD students will be appointed for three years, initially for one year and then a further two years subject to their successful confirmation of status review at the end of the first year. For more information about postgraduate study at the UFS please see: <http://postgraduate.ufs.ac.za/>.

### APPLY

- Please send a description of your past work, a statement of your research interests, a two to three page maximum outline of the research project you envisage ( related to one of the four themes above), a CV (including grades, courses followed, the title of your master's thesis), and a list of any presentations and publications, as well as the names and email addresses of two academic referees,
- Students currently finishing their master's degree are also invited to apply.
- The PhD scholarships must commence in January 2014.
- South African and international students are invited to apply.
- The applications should be received by the 31 August, 2013.
- Please send application in one merged file to walkermj@ufs.ac.za

Funding covers one economy fare for return travel if coming from outside Bloemfontein, fees, a non-taxable allowance and research expenses. Office space and computing equipment are also provided.

Applicants for PhD positions whose higher education research does not fall within any of the themes above may also apply if their projects broadly relate to higher education and social justice.

## POST DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS

CHECaR has two vacancies for post-doctoral fellows attached to any one of the projects above, starting any time from August 2013. The positions are full-time for up to 3 years, on the basis of satisfactory performance.

### PROFILE

- Candidates should hold a PhD degree in the Social Sciences or Humanities.
- It is considered an advantage if candidates have research experience in the field of higher education indicated by presentations and publications.
- Candidates should have a keen interest in interdisciplinary research.
- There is no explicit preference for qualitative or quantitative methods but proficiency in both areas is welcome.

Note that all post doctoral fellows will be expected to: publish two peer reviewed articles each year; develop publications/ book from their PhD; contribute to research on one CHECaR project; and, co-supervise at least masters or PhD student.

### APPLY

Applications should arrive no later than 31 August 2013, by email to [walkermj@ufs.ac.za](mailto:walkermj@ufs.ac.za). Please include your CV, including the title of your PhD, a brief motivation letter and a one or two (maximum) summary of the research you would like to carry out within the research themes and projects above. Please merge all the documents in one file.

Funding covers one economy fare for return travel if coming from outside Bloemfontein, a non-taxable allowance, and research expenses. Office space and computing equipment are also provided.

## VISITING INTERNATIONAL PHD AND POST DOCTORAL SCHOLARS

In addition to the opportunities noted above, there are also opportunities for international PhD scholars *working in the field of human development, capabilities and education* who have submitted their theses but who are awaiting examination to visit CHECaR *for a minimum of one month and a maximum of three months* to work on one of our research projects. Post-doctoral scholars in the field are similarly invited.

Funding covers a return air fare to Bloemfontein, accommodation and subsistence. Office space and computing equipment will also be provided.

**For further informal enquiries for all the above PhD and Post-Doctoral positions, contact Professor Melanie Walker at [walkermj@ufs.ac.za](mailto:walkermj@ufs.ac.za)**