

SA social impact centre in top five globally

Issued by [UCT Graduate School of Business](#)

30 Jan 2017

The Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) has been benchmarked in the top five globally for social impact in a new report from the Bridgespan Group.

Social impact education has entered the mainstream and the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is among a handful of global leaders in the field - according to a [new report from the Bridgespan Group](#).

The Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the GSB has been profiled in the report as one of five university-based social impact centres that are leading the way in terms of social impact education globally.

The GSB is benchmarked alongside business school heavyweights including: the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business; the Social Enterprise Initiative at Harvard Business School; the Center for Social Innovation at Stanford's Graduate School of Business, and the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School.

In addition to its analysis of the five leading social impact centres, the Bridgespan report includes a broad landscape scan of more than 60 programmes within business schools and across universities worldwide.

There has been rapid growth in social impact initiatives at business schools within the last decade. "The report points out that ten years ago, merely establishing such a centre was a distinctive act of leadership. But now, it's viewed as table stakes," said Dr François Bonnici, Director of the Bertha Centre. "Today, almost 50% of the top 50 business schools in the world host a social impact programme, initiative, or centre."

The Bertha Centre, which was established in 2011, is a relative newcomer to the scene - it celebrated its fifth anniversary at the end of 2016. By comparison, Harvard's Social Enterprise Initiative is 20 years old. The Bertha Centre is also the only centre in an emerging economy to be featured in the report.

"We are the first academic centre of its kind in Africa and our centre was established in partnership with the [Bertha Foundation](#), a family foundation that works with inspiring leaders who are catalysts for social and economic change and human rights," says Dr Bonnici. "Our goal is to achieve social justice and impact through teaching, research, events and actionable projects. We have infused social impact into the core of the business school curriculum, convinced that future leaders need to create economic, social and environmental value for an inclusive, sustainable country and continent. We have developed deep expertise in the areas of [education](#); [health](#) and [finance](#) innovation."

Bonnici adds that the centre has received significant support from the more established centres around the world and has been able to learn from them.

According to the late Pamela Hartigan, former director of the Skoll Centre for Entrepreneurship and pioneer of the field, the impetus for social impact work in business schools often comes from students (and increasingly, alumni) who are demanding more robust programming and solutions to a sprawling variety of societal crises - from public education to climate change to health inequities to the role of corporations in society, and beyond.

"Growing numbers of young people, enlightened leaders, and citizens around the world are signalling that they are not content to stand by and wring their hands. Instead, this wave of talent is demonstrating both the creativity and the resolve needed to tackle what threatens us all," said Hartigan.

"We believe in the power of people organising to shift systems, to shift the world," said Laura Horwitz, Chief Operating Officer of the Bertha Foundation. "That is why we invest in the Bertha Centre and others organising for progressive social change geared toward overcoming extreme global inequality. We are proud that their achievements have been recognised in this new report."

The report analyses four promising future directions and opportunities identified by practitioners and experts in the social impact field including educating and preparing a broader range of student talent for social impact work across the social and private sectors. Dr Bonnici adds that these centres also have a role to play in pushing universities and business schools to organise themselves more innovatively – to become more relevant and resilient.

"This debate is pertinent in the face of #FeesMustFall protests and discussions around the future shape and purpose of university education in South Africa. After all, social innovation requires that we [challenge the rules and status quo of power and exclusion](#) by building new products, processes, and models that: a) deliver greater social value, and b) challenge established belief systems, cultures, behaviours, flows of resources, and positions of power. If we are teaching disruptive approaches to our students, why shouldn't we apply them to how our own higher education institutions deliver that education?"

Director of the GSB Associate Professor Mills Soko agrees that business schools in Africa need to prioritise relevance and impact and should be prepared to shake things up if necessary. "Not only do we have an important role to play in training business leaders and entrepreneurs who are properly equipped to build successful and profitable businesses that also move society forward, but we can also use our position, research skills and convening power to influence policy and practices to tackle pressing social problems," he said.

"This endorsement from the global community for the work of the Bertha Centre comes at an apt point in the school's transformation journey. It is a further boost to what we do and encouragement to continue with this important work."

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