

A summary history of UCT Law and overview of the Kramer Law School and surrounds

Middle Campus, University of Cape Town



UCT's Law Faculty buildings history

It was more than 160 years ago, with the Act 12 of 1858, that law teaching was launched in South Africa - although the first lecture was not delivered until 16 April 1859. The early years were documented most eloquently by Professor Denis Cowen in his history of the UCT Law Faculty, *A History, 1858 - 2004* that Cowen co-authored with Danie Visser.

Lectures were delivered in the Master's Meeting Room in the old Supreme Court at the top of Adderley Street until 1896, after which the College Council made determined efforts to ensure that lectures be delivered in the College Buildings on Government Avenue. The year 1916 heralded the beginning of a new chapter in the story of South African legal education, when provision was made for the creation of the Universities of Stellenbosch and Cape Town. The Cape Town Act specifically provided that the old South African College should become a University, thereby maintaining continuity with our early history.

Around this time, the University authorities also decided to appoint full-time professors of Law. In 1923 a Chair of Roman Law and Jurisprudence was established out of funds raised in memory of Mr W P Schreiner; and in 1925 a second Chair of Law was established. The first occupants of these two Chairs were respectively the late Professor J Kerr Wylie (1924-1948) and the late Professor Eric Emmett (1925-1945). Meanwhile, student numbers continued to grow until in 1939, 74 students were registered in the Faculty.

Lectures in law courses which also qualified as arts courses were offered on the main upper campus, but lectures in law courses for the final two years of the LLB syllabus were given in the old 'Egyptian Building' at the top of Government Avenue. Over the years, the Faculty was housed in the PD Hahn building on

Upper Campus (70s/ 80s), and then moved to the School of Education building at the south end of University Avenue, and is now situated in the Wilfred & Jules Kramer Building on Middle Campus.

The Faculty's current student numbers indicate over 1 200 registered Law students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels - drawn mostly from South Africa, but also from numerous other countries on the continent and elsewhere. 43% of students are postgraduate, showing the strength of the UCT research endeavour in Law, and the Faculty's growing contribution to knowledge development.



Middle Campus and the Kramer Law School

While Middle Campus was for many years limited to the Kramer Building (previously the School of Education) and the Woolsack Residence precinct, it has in the last 20 years grown to include All Africa House, the School of Economics, Masingene (UCT's main student administration and admissions building) and, most recently, the d-School (the Hasso Plattner School for Design Thinking) which was officially opened on 12 October 2022.

The Middle Campus itself is interesting and has a number of noteworthy elements.

Following the 1652 hostile occupation by the Dutch of what was then called the Cape of Good Hope, the Dutch demarcated land for allocation to the first Dutch "free burghers". One of these allocations was the Rustenburg Farm. Notably, Middle Campus is marked by a steep pathway (Japonica Walk – see below) from Lovers' Walk below the Bremner Building (home to UCT's executive administration) to the Summer House, an 18th century structure just below the M3 highway which separates Middle and Upper Campus. This Summer House, an easily visible open white structure on a wide stretch of grass, was part of the Rustenburg Farm. At the time, Dutch governor Jan van Riebeeck reserved a piece of this land to be used as an orchard by the Dutch East India Company (known as the VoC, the Dutch government's official

international trading business). The house on this farm (located off university property, on the Rondebosch Main Road) was probably completed by 1663. The farm was used by successive Dutch commanders of the Cape as a country residence, where they could entertain VoC and other Dutch government visitors.

In 1683 Simon van der Stel (then Dutch governor of the Cape of Good Hope) made Rustenburg his preferred place of residence, and he used to ride into Cape Town on horseback when he needed to attend to official business. Van der Stel invested heavily in the propagation of oak trees and the planting of vines and, although Rustenburg eventually fell out of favour as an official residence, by the middle of the 18th century it retained its place as a model Dutch “state farm”. A second storey was added to the main house in about 1780 when the façade was also altered by the addition of four fine pilasters. During the early years of the 20th century, the building came into the possession of the Cape School Board, who in 1939 attempted to have it demolished. This was prevented ultimately by the intervention of the Heritage Monuments Council, and this building and the Summer House were declared separately as National Monuments under old NMC legislation (on 22 August 1941, and 3 June 1960 respectively). The main building is a central part of the Rustenburg Junior School campus and is easily visible on Main Road in Rondebosch.

The Summer House is the oldest building on UCT’s Groote Schuur campus, and is visible between the Kramer Law School and the M3 highway. It was designed as a belvedere, a raised structure from which to enjoy an extensive view, and to provide a shady retreat in summer. A garden plan that was drawn up in 1791 for Rustenburg House features a drawing of the Summer House as the focal point for an avenue of oaks leading up the hillside from the house. When Cecil John Rhodes bought the land for the Groote Schuur estate a century later, he commissioned Sir Herbert Baker to restore the by then dilapidated Summer House. Baker did this, however, without following the style of the original. In the 1920s a large rose garden was planted in front of the Summer House, but in 1972 there was further restoration when the rose garden was replaced by the lawns that are there today (the walkways were added in the late 1980s)

The Japonica Walk, to the left of the Kramer Law School if one faces the mountain, leads up to the Summer House. By 1814 this was an oak-lined walk and was a distinctive feature of Rustenburg farm. When Cecil John Rhodes purchased the Groote Schuur estate, he made parts of it freely accessible to the public, and this area was a popular picnic spot. The first plantings of japonica shrubs (also known as camellias which bear pink, red and white flowers in late winter and early spring), along the walkway are thought to have dated from the 1890s. The development of the Middle Campus in the 1980s led to fears among the Cape Town public that the University would deny public access to Japonica Walk, but this was not the case. In 1982 new japonicas, specially developed for South African conditions, were planted to replace those that had died over the previous 90 years.

The Rustenburg Burial Ground is a burial site situated between All Africa House and the School of Economics. A piece of the graveyard wall has been preserved and is now covered with glass in the centre of a peaceful grassy area between the two building. It is understood that the cemetery was the resting place for slaves who worked the farms along the Liesbeeck River in the 17th and 18th centuries. It

is also understood that in the 1930s all remains were removed from the site, but there are no details of this or where these remains were moved to.

When the Middle Campus Development was re-energised for the development of the School of Economics, the Burial Ground was identified – and was seen as an opportunity to “frame the development of the Middle Campus around the themes of memory and reconciliation”. UCT adopted a set of principles to follow in its development of the affected area:

- No digging on the identified sensitive areas (within the walls) where the burial sites were discovered
- Any development on UCT ground must be subjected to a broad public consultation process
- Cultural sensitivity must be maintained
- UCT must become part of the City
- Permanent public access to the site
- No further disturbance of the burial ground
- If any human remains are uncovered during construction, all works should be halted and the stakeholder group be consulted
- Ongoing consultation with the stakeholder forum during and post construction.

In 2014 a campus-wide competition was run for design proposals to commemorate the site. This commemorative construction is still in development.

Dialogue at the Dogwatch, to the right of Kramer Law School if one is facing the mountain, is a sculptural *tableau vivant* set at the dogwatch – that time at sea when the light is fading, the day gives way to dusk, and stars appear in the night sky. In this installation, David Brown, whose work has engaged with the trope of the ship of fools, and the paradoxes, follies and brutalities of South African life, imagined a silent conversation in a turbulent, yet hopeful, period of political transition. The sculpture – fifteen months in the making – was forged, welded and cast in bronze, corten, stainless steel, brass and copper. David Brown (born 1951) graduated from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, UCT and worked as a printmaker and documentary photographer before turning to sculpture. He has won several awards and undertaken many major commissions. His work is represented in both South African and foreign collections.

‘*Dialogue at the Dogwatch*’ was donated to the University in 2011 by Charles Diamond. He was President of the SRC in 1966/67, graduated from UCT with an MA in Economics, and became a global economist. A collector of sculpture, he commissioned David Brown to create the installation for his home in England in 1993.



Alma Mater is a bronze sculpture by Bruce Arnott, completed in 1996, of a female figure atop a supporting column. Referred to as a *caryatid* and often associated with classical Greek figurines, this is not exclusively a western figure, since it is known from China, ancient Persia, West Africa and the Congo, particularly in the art of the Luba people. This caryatid symbolically combines the twin roles of authority and responsibility. The phrase, Alma Mater (Latin: ‘nurturing mother’), is often used to denote a school or university, and here we see the emblems of learning being generously offered by the stylistically evolved caryatid figure. The chameleons represent historical process and transformation.

Given its proximity to the Wilfred & Jules Kramer Law Building, Alma Mater is often referred to as the Justice Pillar – perhaps erroneously seen as a kind of modern take on “Lady Liberty” and the scales of justice.



Sources

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2. UCT News www.news.uct.ac.za
3. UCT marketing materials
4. *The UCT Law Faculty: a history 1859 – 2004* by Denis Cowen and Daniel Visser

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