



## SACLA 2015: HoD Colloquium Minutes

**Date:** 1 July 2015  
**Time:** 10h00 - 13h00  
**Venue:** Wits Club, University of the Witwatersrand

### **Attendees:**

Andre Calitz (NMMU), Barry Dwolatsky (Wits), Elize Ehlers (UJ), Jean Greyling (NMMU), Mitchell Hughes (Wits), Jan Kroeze (UNISA), Josef Langerman (Standard Bank), Jane Nash (Rhodes), Lisa Seymour (UCT), Alta van der Merwe (UP), Ruth Wario (UFS).

### 1. Welcome

The 2015 HoD Colloquium was opened by the host HoD, Mitchell Hughes, of Wits. All attendees were welcomed and thanked for their continued support of this relatively new initiative.

### 2. Minutes of the previous HoD Colloquium

The minutes of the 2014 HoD Colloquium, hosted by NMMU, were included in the pack given to all attendees. There was no need for approval as this was done electronically in December 2014.

### 3. Industry-academic collaboration

Josef Langerman of Standard Bank presented on the need for industry and academia to work more closely in meeting South Africa's technology skills

shortages and evolving skills needs. The presentation included a short video and then moved into a facilitated discussion where academics articulated some of the challenges they face in balancing their responsibility to society in creating a skilled labour force whilst remaining true to the spirit of academia.

Whilst academics unanimously agreed that increased collaboration with industry could potentially yield benefits in both teaching and research, there remain many obstacles to be overcome. These were common across all institutions represented and included:

- Difficulty in defining the nature of academic-industry collaboration
- Academic workloads and time (teaching, administration, research and academic citizenship)
- Industry collaboration not being a traditional academic KPI (linked to the above point)
- Competition between academic institutions, between disciplines and between corporates making a unified approach difficult
- Academic institutions and industry having differing objectives and standards, particularly in terms of education vs training (industry requiring “skills” indicates demand for the latter)
- University hierarchies and bureaucracy (“red tape”) making responding proactively and dynamically to skills gaps difficult, particularly in terms of introducing new courses

- Industry wanting quicker wins through shorter courses, when academia's focus is on three year (or longer) cycles with wider pedagogical responsibilities ("graduateness" vs mere skills transfer)
- Industry not backing up their demands with financial support or "deep" partnership

Despite these challenges, several suggestions were made which could potentially yield closer collaboration. These included:

- Collaboration through industry-funded research projects
- Internships within industry providing integrated learning opportunities
- Industry-funded academic posts
- Industry participation via advisory boards

The HoD Colloquium would like to place on record its appreciation to Alta van der Merwe for facilitating this engagement.

#### 4. AISSAC links with HoDs

Jan Kroeze spoke briefly about the AISSAC chapter and called for each IS HoD to suggest a suitable contact person within his/her department/division. Each HoD will liaise with Jan in the coming weeks/months.

#### 5. Discussion: Common issues facing HoDs

This discussion was limited owing to Point 3 above taking a substantial amount of the allocated time. Several pressing issues were discussed as follows:

## 5.1 Student numbers

In light of the technology skills crisis, there was a discussion around proactive ways of encouraging more students to take up technology-related study, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There was a suggestion of encouraging more industry involvement in creating awareness and there was also a question around a previous SACLA initiative, called the “Birchwood Declaration”, which now appears to be dormant. The most practical suggestion was to approach SAICSIT for funds to put together a promotional video that could be used on all institutions’ web sites and in talks to students, school outreach etc.

## 5.2 Transformation

Most HoDs present acknowledged that this is arguably the most challenging issue facing us, particularly in the light of the recent “Rhodes Must Fall” controversy. Transformation directives appear to be two-fold, firstly in terms of achieving appropriate representation in staff complement, and secondly in terms of curriculum, where there is a push for more “Africanised” content. There also remain challenges in achieving gender representation in both staff and student numbers and also our responsibility to the wider African context, again in terms of both staff and students.

Some practical suggestions were made in terms of curriculum transformation, including seeking out African technology entrepreneurs

and potentially setting up a shared database of names that could be approached to deliver inspirational guest lectures. There was also a suggestion around ensuring that technology project work has a more socially responsible element, wherever possible.

Staff transformation remains a massive challenge, given both the scarcity of appropriately qualified candidates and academia's inability to compete with corporate salaries.

#### 6. Future HoD colloquia

This was not explicitly addressed, but both the attendance and fruitful discussion indicate that the HoD Colloquium has an important role to play and should continue at SACLA 2016, if possible.

#### 7. Closure

The colloquium closed at 13h00.