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Thuso solutions are potential game changers for emerging academic scholars and researchers

Emerging academic scholars and researchers' development in South Africa's public universities will take a new turn, on Thursday, 18 May, when Universities South Africa (USAf) and the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) launch potentially life-changing development platforms created specifically for these groups.

[Thuso Resources](#), for one, is a free online repository of key information resources, modules and programmes that have been selectively gathered from all universities and other sources, and made available for the capacity building of early career academics and researchers. [Thuso Connect](#), for another, is meant to connect early career scholars and researchers with experienced mentors to support them on this academic journey. Thuso is a Sesotho word meaning "Help".

These platforms are a direct response to findings of the 2018 USAf study on '*Building a Cadre of Emerging Scholars for Higher Education in South Africa*.' This report stated a myriad of barriers to the advancement of research careers in academia, which were found to be endemic across the sector. Young academics cited heavy teaching and administrative loads, insufficient research time and a lack of mentors, research networks and funding -- among many impediments to the pursuit of doctoral studies and academic research careers.

Professor Stephanie Burton, a USAf Research Fellow and Leader of the Advancing of Early Career Researchers and Scholars (AECRS) project, lauds these platforms for responding to real challenges. "In the interest of working together collaboratively, to build strengths, South African universities are partnering in sharing instruments, resources and training offerings on an open-access online platform," she says of Thuso Resources. On Thuso Connect, Professor Burton says "individuals who are seeking mentorship and others who are willing to offer it can meet through the programme, and work together in a partnership. The platform provides an effective, ethical way of introducing mentors and mentees."

Both platforms are part of the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) sponsored AECRS project that is being driven under the auspices of USAf. USAf's Project Manager, Ms Janet Van Rhyn, says that these two platforms demonstrate how universities can effectively collaborate, and share resources for the benefit of all emerging researchers and scholars, regardless of the institution they are associated with. It has been very encouraging to see how universities have embraced this initiative, especially the staff in the research offices and postgraduate offices.

Ms Van Rhyn also encourages established academics and researchers who have a passion for supporting the upcoming generation of academics and researchers, to register as mentors on the Thuso Connect platform. They can do so on www.thusoconnect.mywisdomshare.com

The DSI sees the Thuso platforms as an opportunity to stimulate South Africa's socio-economic development through research and innovation, says Dr Phil Mjwara, Director General of the DSI: "It

is an honour for my department to be part of this project. I therefore request that we embrace all the advances offered to us by this technology and, particularly, these two online platforms.”

USAf pleased with this impact-oriented solution

Dr Phethiwe Matutu, USAf’s Chief Executive Officer and a big champion of human capacity development, has lauded this project as “an opportunity for emerging researchers to learn from their established counterparts in other institutions through curated resources.” She says the launch of these platforms epitomises USAf’s firm belief in human capacity development, and response, to the systemic challenges posing a risk to Higher Education sustainability.

She has assured researchers in the early stages of their careers of a well-thought through support programme. “This solution will most likely exceed your expectations,” Dr Matutu says.

The launch event will be hosted from the Emerald Conference Room of the CSIR Convention Centre today, (Thursday, 18 May), from 10:00. While physical attendance is by invitation only, the event will be live streamed on the USAf YouTube channel:

<https://youtube.com/@universitiessouthafrica6819>.

For more information on the platforms, visit www.thusoresources.usaf.ac.za

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