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COLLOQUIUM

Beyond Detection: Reimagining Higher Education's Response to AI

Prof Sioux McKenna (Rhodes University)

DATE: Monday, 4 August 2025 | 16h00–17h00 SAST

VENUES:

- **Stellenbosch University:** Neelsie Cinema
- **University of the Witwatersrand:** Room P215, 2nd Floor, Physics Building
- **North-West University:** Seminar room K310, Physics building G5
- **Online**

--- A recording of the talk will be published on the NITheCS YouTube channel afterwards ---

ABSTRACT

Higher education's response to the emergence of Generative AI has largely been focused on detection and prevention – how to identify when students use AI tools and how to maintain academic integrity. While these concerns are valid, they represent a narrow framing that obscures fundamental questions about the purpose and future of universities. This presentation argues that our response to AI must be grounded in a clear understanding of what higher education is for. If we conceptualise the university as a common good, with responsibilities to people and the planet, then our engagement with AI's possibilities and threats takes on distinct characteristics. Drawing on Critical University Studies and Public Good Frameworks, this talk examines how universities positioned as a common good might grapple with AI's implications across three interconnected areas: research practices and knowledge production, teaching and learning methodologies, and the university's broader role as a significant social structure within democratic societies. Rather than reactive policies focused on constraint, this perspective demands proactive consideration of how AI can serve collective flourishing while identifying where it threatens the values and purposes that make higher education a public good. The presentation offers some practical frameworks for institutional leaders, faculty, and students to navigate this complex terrain.

BIOGRAPHY

Sioux McKenna is Professor of Higher Education Research at Rhodes University. Her varied research interests include interrogations of the relationship between the state and universities across Africa, the purpose and structure of doctoral education, the politics of internationalisation, the acquisition of discipline specific academic literacies, and the ways in which the three industries of university rankings, academic publishing, and EdTech are embraced by the higher education sector. She is an NRF-rated researcher who manages several large international projects and collaborates with universities and related organisations around the world.



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