

Call for applications: Masters bursaries for 2023

Seeds of Good Anthropocenes Initiative: Building sustainable, just and biodiverse futures in southern Africa

Deadline for applications EXTENDED: 23 June 2022

Project background

There is growing consensus that significant transformations at local to global scales are required to place humanity and the Earth on a more sustainable and equitable trajectory of development. Achieving Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require systemic transformations across multiple sectors, including food systems, economies and shared ecosystems. Escalating global challenges such as climate change, food and water security, biodiversity loss, socio-political conflict and economic volatility require unique and innovative solutions. At the same time, it has become critical to recognize the complex inter-relationships between human well-being and ecological sustainability. It has also become essential to recognize the power of human imagination and agency to anticipate and engage with new and ongoing changes that may be fundamentally unknown and unpredictable.

We urgently need approaches that help us identify sustainability initiatives, innovations and practices that hold the potential to trigger transformative pathways toward sustainability. Many existing initiatives that have transformative potential are currently marginalized because they do not align with dominant values and forces currently shaping the world. Better understanding the obstacles such initiatives face, and how they may be better supported to effect transformative is a critical area of research and policy. Furthermore, better understanding of the types of values which may be emphasized or prioritized under different pathways, may be critical to informing policy choices and directing investments towards sustainability transformations.

The South African Research Chair (SARChI) in Social-Ecological Systems and Resilience, held by Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs aims to contribute to better understanding how transformative change can be facilitated at a range of scales, specifically in a southern African context. This thematic area of work under the Chair builds on the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes initiative (<https://goodanthropocenes.wordpress.com/>) that is being conducted in collaboration with the Stockholm Resilience Centre in Sweden, McGill University in Canada, and other partners. This initiative aims to inform and contribute to deep, systemic transformations towards socially and ecologically desirable, just, and sustainable futures, by identifying and connecting initiatives (“seeds”) that currently exist at the margins of society, and have the potential to grow, change and combine in surprising ways to create a variety of possible, radically alternative, positive futures (see Bennett et al 2016¹).

Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST), Stellenbosch University

The Centre for Sustainability Transitions (<http://www.sun.ac.za/cst>) builds on a strong history of transdisciplinary research and complexity studies at Stellenbosch University, providing a vibrant hub for solution-oriented sustainability science that hosts leading scientists and students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in a state-of-the-art research centre. The primary objective of the CST is to provide transformational knowledge on the dynamics of multi-scale social-ecological change, and strategic insights into the new modes of research and governance that can bring about a just transition to a more equitable and sustainable society, in southern Africa and globally.

¹ Bennett E et al. 2016. Bright spots: Seeds of a good Anthropocene. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 14(8): 441-448.

Call for applications

We seek motivated individuals interested to pursue a Masters degree linked to the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes initiative, who have a keen interest in sustainability, biodiversity and transition-related research, an interest and ability to integrate across the social and natural sciences, and who enjoy collaboration and working in teams. The candidate will be expected to be based at the CST, and interested individuals should have a strong academic track-record, participate in the events and activities of the CST, and be interested in developing a career around topics such as social-ecological systems, resilience and risk, complexity thinking, and sustainability transformations.

The main theme of the Masters project would relate to cataloguing and analyzing select examples of sustainability-related transformations to explore patterns and processes of change. This could draw on examples from the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes database (<https://goodanthropocenes.wordpress.com/>). A variety of focal topics under this theme are available:

- “Seeds” of equitable biodiversity conservation in Africa- focal topics could include responses to illegal wildlife trade; Indigenous responses to biodiversity conservation; sustainable use of wildlife or biodiversity conservation and equity outcomes
- “Seeds” of Indigenous plant use and conservation- focal topics could include responses to climate change, biodiversity loss or food insecurity; or sustainable use and management of Indigenous plant resources
- The use of creative and arts-based approaches/methodologies as 'seeds' for catalysing transformations towards just and sustainable futures

Supervisors will include Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs, and one or more CST researchers, depending on the topic, including Dr Nyasha Magadzire, Dr Julia van Velden and Dr Nadia Sitas. Studies will generally be registered in the CST’s MPhil in Sustainable Development in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, but other options can be considered.

Funding

Bursaries will be funded from the DST/NRF SARChI chair held by Prof Biggs. The NRF minimum academic requirement for first-time master’s funding is a minimum average of 65% for all subjects at the honours level OR a minimum average of 65% for all subjects of a postgraduate diploma OR a minimum average of 65% for all final year subjects of a four-year degree. Applicants for master’s funding must be 30 years of age or younger in the year of application i.e., applicants must not be over 30 years by 31 December 2022.

Successful applicants will be funded either at Full Cost Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS). The FCS funding will be awarded to South African citizens and permanent residents only, who are either financially needy (i.e., those whose combined household family income is less or equal to R350 000 per annum), living with a disability, or exceptional academic achievers. PCS funding will be awarded to 5% of international students including South African citizens and permanent residents who could not be funded under FCS but meet other minimum requirements for the NRF scholarship funding criteria.

Subject to availability of funds, CST aims to top-up NRF funding for living costs to Masters to R 120,000 pa (R 10,000 per month) for full-time studies over 2 years. Tuition and reasonable running and travel expenses will also be covered where possible.

Requirements

Potential students applying for a Masters degree should have completed an Honours or four-year undergraduate degree or equivalent to be eligible. All candidates should show evidence of strong scholarly performance. Based on the National Research Foundation’s funding guidelines, strong preference will be given to South African nationals and under-represented groups.

To apply

Applications will follow a 2-step process:

Step 1. Apply to CST

All interested candidates should first apply to the CST by emailing the following documents to cstenquiries@sun.ac.za by **23 June 2022** with the subject line “**Masters application: Seeds of Good Anthropocenes**”:

- a motivation letter (detailing your previous academic and work experience, and how your experiences and skills speak to the proposed research topic, as well as your specific interests with regard to the proposed project),
- a detailed CV that includes your academic record, previous work experience, any scientific publications on which you have been an author, and the names of at least two academic referees,
- transcripts of academic qualifications,
- at least one example of recent written work (e.g. a paper, report, thesis chapter).

Step 2. Apply to NRF

Selected candidates from step 1 will be instructed to apply on the NRF system by **8 July 2022**, and link their application to Prof Biggs’ SARChI Chair. Instructions on this process will be communicated to successful applicants from step 1.

Please note that funding will only be awarded to candidates selected and approved by the NRF.

Enquiries

Enquiries can be directed to cstenquiries@sun.ac.za. Please use the subject line “**Enquiry: Masters Seeds of Good Anthropocenes**”, as enquiries about multiple adverts are being directed to this address.