CALL FOR SDGS AND DATA SCIENCE POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP APPLICATIONS

The Albert Luthuli Leadership Institute (ALLI) at the University of Pretoria, through the South African SDG Hub and in collaboration with the Data Science for Social Impact Research (DSFSI) group and ABSA Chair of Data Science in the Department of Computer Science, is calling for qualified persons interested to apply for a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship.

Background

In theory, African universities' increasing research output has the potential to improve policymaking significantly. By using this growing reservoir of local research, policymakers can development and implement more impactful policies. In practice, however, the growth in African research productivity will not lead to better policies as a matter of course. One reason is that peer-reviewed research is mostly published behind paywalls in peer-reviewed journals, which causes access problems. Another is relevance: policymakers are often unable to determine the relevance of research output. Relatedly, policymakers often do not have the time to collect and analyse peer-reviewed research.

The Albert Luthuli Leadership Institute at the University of Pretoria, through the South African SDG Hub, is interested in appointing a postdoctoral researcher with data science skills to develop and apply methodologies that could increase and improve the use of research in policy making processes. The researcher will build on and improve on the work of the South African SDG Hub, an online platform that provides policymakers with free access to peer-reviewed research, classified in terms of one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The above work will be in collaboration with the Data Science for Social Impact Research (DSFSI) group and ABSA Chair of Data Science in the Computer Science Department at University of Pretoria. A core research focus of DSFSI is research in Natural Language Processing. Successful applicants are expected to shape their own research agenda while collaborating with other researchers inside the university as well as official collaborators such as the Masakhane project. Applicants will join DSFSI and access the resources (such as computation) that are available through the group.

Description

The Postdoctoral Research Fellow will be required to focus on the following:

- *Research on improved evidence-informed policy making as it relates to the SDGs.* This includes working on and improving the existing technology underlying the South African SDG Hub and engaging policy makers as required and relevant. Of interest is investigating novel approaches for Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning to identify SDG patterns in South Africa.

- *Administration and limited assessment responsibilities related to the interdisciplinary Master's in Development Practice (MDP).* The MDP is a member of the Global Association of MDPs and focuses on the leadership capabilities needed to implement complex development agendas such as the SDGs.
- *Logistical and administrative support*. Postdoctoral researchers will support network-building, fundraising, media or other operational functions of the South African SDG Hub.

Please note that the successful candidate will be required to commence with their duties on *1 January 2022*.

Requirements

An ideal applicant would have an analytical background with experience in Natural Language Processing or Machine Learning and seeking to expand their horizons in research that is multi-disciplinary and looks at the development of our society.

Only candidates that fit the ideal profile above and satisfy the minimum requirements below will be eligible for selection:

- Must have completed a doctorate in a relevant field.
- Must have attained their doctorate no more than five years prior to their appointment as postdoctoral fellows.
- Must be a young researcher (generally up to 40 years of age).
- Candidates with proven interest in the Sustainable Development Goals will have an added advantage.
- Evidence of active research and publications in peer-reviewed journals will also be an added advantage.

Value of the Fellowship

The Postdoctoral Fellowship consists of a bursary of R350 000 per year and the fellowship will run for two years, funding permitting.

Application process

Your application should include a full Curriculum Vitae, three referees with contact details (one of whom must have been a mentor or supervisor of the doctorate), degree certificates and a 300-word motivation.

Applications and enquiries should be sent to both Prof Willem Fourie (willem.fourie@up.ac.za) and Dr Vukosi Marivate (vukosi.marivate@up.ac.za).

Closing date for applications: 5 November 2021