University signs free info access agreement

Max McLaren

STELLENBOSCH University became the first African university to sign the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities yesterday.

By signing the declaration, Stellenbosch University has agreed to open up its vast resources to the public, ensuring individuals and communities free and easy access to academic research, scholarly material, data sets, scientific journals and dissertations.

The aim is to stimulate research and promote human development, especially in Africa.

In addition to signing the declaration, Stellenbosch University has established an open-access repository, SUNScholar, which can be accessed via the website http://scholars.sun.ac.za

This is an electronic archive that allows access to research articles, inaugural addresses, conference proceedings and other material.

Ellen Tise, senior director of Stellenbosch University's library and information service and president of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, signed the declaration at an open seminar at 2pm yesterday at the JS Gericek Library.

The signing was also streamed live to an international audience.

“The signing of the declaration by the university is a demonstration of its commitment to sharing its research output and other scholarly material with research communities, especially those on the African continent,” Tise said.

The Berlin Declaration was adopted by international institutions in 2006 after experts concluded at a conference in Germany that the internet could provide humanity with an opportunity to make knowledge universally accessible.

Internet entrepreneur and proponent of online software Mark Shuttleworth was among the guest speakers at the online seminar.

“The Berlin Declaration empowers researchers to get out there, talk openly and compellingly about the work that they are doing and to generate the interest that will sustain them, their work and the institutions that host them,” Shuttleworth said.

The signing formed part of activities dedicated to Open Access Week – a global event, now in its fourth year.

Open access promotes the growth of scholarly output by removing the barriers of cost and legal restrictions.

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