

Segran Nair appointed as Milpark Business School's new director

Issued by [Milpark Education](#)

5 Jul 2023

Director of Milpark Business School Segran Nair says that it is critical for business schools to not only develop business literacy skills among students but to develop individuals holistically so that they become better businesspeople - and better leaders.



Segran Nair has been appointed director of Milpark Business School. Nair, formerly the director of open academic programmes at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB), took on the role on 1 June 2023.

He brings a wealth of experience to his new position. A respected thought leader in strategy, management, and leadership, Nair has consulted to the higher education sector in South Africa as well as startups within South Africa and the Netherlands. He has held senior positions at the UCT GSB as well as prestigious universities abroad, including Cornell University, George Mason University, and Brown University.

While he recognises the value of business schools, he maintains that they need to continue earning their place: "If the community gets up one day, and they realise that Milpark Business School does not exist, but they never miss it, it begs the question: Why did we exist in the first place? What is it that we're adding – and is it really something that is valued?" he asks.

That value, he says, goes back to a business school's core principles: to create spaces that facilitate, amongst other things, the development of individuals' business numeracy and literacy skills.

"We aim to bridge the gap between the accountants sitting at one end of the table and the rest of us sitting at the other. But we go much further than that," he says. "We develop the holistic aspects of the individual, too."

Of this process, Nair says: "It goes back to Michael Jackson's song, *Man in the Mirror*. It requires people to be incredibly

deliberate and to ask themselves: Is that really me? We want to develop higher levels of emotional intelligence so that we can engage with people with a different sense of what it means to be a leader.”

It’s exactly these sorts of ‘soft’ skills – engagement, collaboration, and communication – that build strong relationships; they have been the essential elements of Nair’s own leadership style and continued success. Discussions with key stakeholders – from staff, to students, to employers of Milpark Business School graduates – have reinforced to Nair that alongside maintaining its core values, the school needs to be able to respond to – and be informed by – what is currently happening in the world.

“I’m not one for fads,” he says, “but we need to include topics such as big data, fintech, digital marketing to name a few in our offerings at the business school. From this vantage point, we must create opportunities for students to develop different skills to function successfully in their places of employment.

At the end of the day, our students must understand the consequences of their decisions and be more comfortable making them, while all the while assessing the risk to themselves as decision-makers and the risks to the organisation they work for.

As decision-makers they must also be prepared for the questions that go with the process – that’s what we our students have to be prepared for, and they need to develop the confidence to take this on,” he says.

Additionally, he would like to see Milpark Business School facilitating the development of strategies that contribute towards resolving some of South Africa’s problems.

“One thing that can bring us all together is that blasted word: loadshedding,” he says. “While it’s a dire reality for many businesses and households that depend on Eskom to supply them with electricity, from a leadership point of view, it creates opportunities to build resiliency and creativity to develop different solutions to a critical challenge.”

Nair would also like for South African businesses to have greater business opportunities to participate across the continent. He believes that Milpark Business School is able to contribute toward this push by providing individuals with high-quality education that enables them to compete with and thrive alongside their global and domestic peers. Increased government investment in entrepreneurship would also benefit innovation that the school promotes, he says.

Milpark Business School has also demonstrated its resolve and foresight by developing an online platform for delivering different programs. It remains a digital business school today, and it runs on technology solutions that it has been using and perfecting for more than twenty years prior to the pandemic.

As a Business School, it foresaw the need to have a more accommodating delivery mode to meet students’ needs for flexibility. Nair notes the benefits of the school’s offering but acknowledges: “It’s not a normal 8 to 5 day. We have to make sure that we don’t suffer from burnout.”

Deliberate downtime and a number of touchpoints for students and staff alike are all part of Nair’s and Milpark Business School’s common goal of humanising online education and creating a supportive environment that results in a memorable, successful student journey.

“I see great opportunities within Milpark Business School in terms of being able to move into this next chapter, and to shape it with other individuals by listening to different stakeholders, namely what students are experiencing currently, and what they require to be successful in their studies and career aspirations. We are here to create spaces to help you develop in ways that you never dared imagine or thought possible. We value the trust placed by our students in embarking on their learning journeys with us.”

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