Fewer black, coloured applicants for Maties

University ‘concerned’ about 7 percent fall in ‘African’ registrations

Ilse Fredericks
EDUCATION WRITER
ilse.fredericks@inl.co.za

STELLENBOSCH University has recorded a “significant drop” in the number of black and coloured first-year student registrations compared with last year, and the Luister video, which described students’ experiences of racism, contributed to the decrease.

Christelle Feyt, the university’s senior director: prospective students, highlighted the effect of Luister, which caused a stir on social media, during a briefing to Parliament’s portfolio committee on higher education and training. “The Luister video impacted on students’ choice to study at Stellenbosch University,” Feyt told the committee at the university yesterday.

The video, released by Open Stellenbosch and Contraband Cape Town, highlighted students’ experiences of discrimination and resulted in the university’s management being called to an urgent meeting of the portfolio committee.

The registration rate for “African black” newcomer first-years in 2016, dropped 7 percent over last year and the coloured group dropped 3 percent.

Feyt said that in light of the decrease a survey was conducted among applicants and their parents.

She said factors such as the university’s language policy and the distance it was from students’ home had played a role.

She told the Cape Argus that the university was “quite concerned” about the decrease.

A number of measures were, however, in place to address the issue, including an initiative to increase enrolments from 100 schools that had traditionally accommodated black pupils.

The university’s language plan also came under the spotlight during the meeting.

“I don’t think that we have experienced a true sense of urgency to change the language policy.

“We have a situation where many students sit in class and simply cannot understand what is being taught on the basis of language and that leads to poor student success rates,” said Bradley Frolick of the university’s Student Representative Council.

He said there was uncertainty and a lack of political will from the university council to change the language policy.

The SRC yesterday said: “In the recent six months, no university structure (including the SRC), has supported the notion of the removal of Afrikaans at this institution.

“University structures have supported the notion to make English the primary means of communication to ensure that the general student population understands and isn’t excluded on the basis of language.

“Second, structures at the university supported the rector’s management team’s proposal of parallel medium for all large classgroups, where practical.”

Antoinette van der Merwe, senior director: learning and teaching and teaching enhancement, said the language policy was under revision.

PW van der Walt, who represented the university council, said the council didn’t want to exclude any student on the basis of language.

Committee chairwoman Yvonne Phosa acknowledged that progress in terms of transformation plans at the university had been made since last year’s meeting with the university management, but that more needed to be done.