

4 April 2016

Dear Colleagues and Students

On Saturday morning our University community woke up yet again to the sad news of the reported rape of one of our female students. As a community we are appalled and shocked by the gender violence perpetrated within our society. Such events leave deep scars and words cannot express the outrage at perpetrators who continue to terrorise our communities. As a campus, town and even a national community we need to work together, even harder and more coordinated to create communities where women can feel safe and are not exposed to disrespect and violent crimes. Our thoughts are with the student, her family and friends, as well as her fellow residents, and we appeal to our campus community to respect their privacy.

CAMPUS SAFETY

The safety of our students and staff is a primary concern and many millions of rand have been spent on safety and security measures over the past few years, especially after the sharp increase in street robberies in 2014. As an institution we want to offer our students a safe and crime-free university town to roam about unrestricted, but with rising crime statistics in our country, this is just not possible. Despite the various initiatives listed below, the open campus and constantly changing security situation in the country, pose a specific challenge.

Over the last few years SU has:

- discontinued exams and tests at night;
- instituted a shuttle service on campus and surrounds, as well as a pedestrian escort service that is available at night;
- doubled the number of guards patrolling the primary routes on campus;
- upgraded pedestrian routes;
- rolled out a vast street camera network;
- established safety kiosks on campus;
- increased the visibility of security officers, patrol vehicles and motorcycles;
- started creating security zones such as the one on the Rooiplein, where a mast with cameras and lights has been erected;
- increased the use of technology, reaction capacity and awareness campaigns focusing on staff and students; and
- forged active partnerships with the SAPS, Stellenbosch Municipality and the broader security community in the town.

After the incident in February the University has again reviewed its safety and security arrangements and will continue to do so. When we appeal to staff and students to be vigilant and to avoid actions that put you at risk, the intention is not to shift the blame for incidents to our campus community. With 25 000+ individuals on our Stellenbosch campus most days of the week, it is just not possible to eliminate all criminal activity. In Stellenbosch the same safety precautions should be taken as elsewhere in the country.

RAPE CULTURE

Stellenbosch University has one of the most extensive security and transport systems to enable safe mobility for students. There seems to be a misunderstanding that security prevents gender violence and rape. As with disciplinary structures, it presents some deterrents, but will not fundamentally shift gender violence. What has been labelled as a 'rape culture' on our campuses goes beyond criminal acts, or legal and disciplinary aspects.

These are complaints of a general culture of disrespect and harassment of women, which are accepted as the norm.

Rape culture – first named and described internationally in the 1970s – is defined as various acts in which sexual aggression or sexual victimisation is normalised due to societal attitudes on gender and sexuality. Behaviours commonly associated with rape culture include sexual objectification, victim blaming, refusing to acknowledge the harm caused by forms of sexual violence, or some combination of these. This should also be seen in the context of challenges in this regard in society as a whole, in South Africa, but also internationally.

At the beginning of March, the Rector's Management Team (RMT) appointed a task team to urgently look into rape culture at the institution and make the necessary recommendations. Existing counter-measures at SU include on-going activities on our various campuses to create awareness about gender issues and sexual harassment. Consciousness-raising sessions and sensitivity training for staff members and students take place both in and outside of residences. But more systemic interventions might be required to challenge entrenched practices. Coming up with recommendations in this regard will fall within the ambit of the task team's scope of work.

However, the task team cannot change the psyche of society. All Matie men have the responsibility to assist with the development of an understanding that respect for women excludes verbal abuse, sexual harassment, inappropriate jokes, catcalling and wolf-whistling. Let's all treat each other with respect.

- Women and men who are sexually harassed, abused or raped should not hesitate to report incidents to either the University's Crisis Service (tel: 082 557 0880) or Campus Security (tel: 021 808 2333; and 021 938 9507 for the Tygerberg Campus). Rape is a criminal offense and should also be reported to the nearest police station. Staff and students who do not want to make use of the above reporting lines should at least report incidents to the University's independent Ethics Hotline – anonymously should they so prefer: 0800 204 549 (tel). The email address is sun@ethics-line.com. Complaints can also be laid at the University's Equality Unit: unfair@sun.ac.za

Kind regards

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Rector and Vice-Chancellor