

DSAf Transformation Forum Statement in response to the Huis Marais Incident

19 May 2022

We as the DSAf Transformation Forum, representing various centres and campuses within the Division Student Affairs (DSAf) and including a representative from the Student Representative Council (SRC), and the Transformation Office wish to add our voices in strongly condemning the recent incident at Huis Marais on Sunday, 15 May 2022, in which a student urinated on a fellow student's belongings. We abhor all forms of discrimination and violence - whether overt or covert - including but not limited to microaggressions, sexual assault, and acts that impinge on the human dignity of our staff and students.

As a Forum we have recently launched our **DSAf Transformation Charter**¹ and this incident goes against our pledge which commits us to “create a transformative learning experience for our students and staff that is all-inclusive regardless of socio-economic status, age, race, gender, ability, sexuality, marital status, belief, ethnic or social origin, culture, nationality, language, and birth, operationalising universal access respect for one’s multiple and varied identities and expressions thereof.”

As DSAf staff, we pledged to:

- (i) provide a learning home for all persons to thrive and be treated with respect and humanity;
- (ii) foster a space where our staff and students have a safe space to be themselves; and
- (iii) inculcate a sense of shared humanity and human dignity”.

We, therefore, acknowledge that there is much to be done to transform *all* spaces at SU.

Following several incidences that had taken place in the Huis Marais male residence, in 2019 a decision was taken by Rectorate to repurpose the residential facility. The decision was taken on the recommendation of the Centre for Student Communities (CSC), DSAf and the DVC: Learning and Teaching, to restructure the residence to ensure that it becomes inclusive and reflects the values of the institution. In 2020, discussions with DSAf, CSC and the residence leadership resulted in the following decision which was communicated to the residence leadership and the wider university in 2020:

- not placing first-year students in the residence in 2021 as was done in 2020
- creating a co-educational residence that would include womxn

In 2020, a decision was taken by the Rectorate, which reversed the aforementioned decisions communicated by DSAf. This decision was reversed in the context of the pressure of litigation by alumni, to reach common ground between the university, House Committee and alumni of Huis Marais.

¹[DSAf Transformation Charter](#)

Various externally facilitated consultations with the residents followed, where the residence leadership and its students committed to transforming the culture within the residence and working towards diversity and inclusivity.

The recent incident highlights that much work still needs to be done and that the interventions put in place by the Rectorate to change the culture and ethos of Huis Marais have failed to yield the desired results.

It is evident with the influx of incidences being reported, that toxic masculine and racist cultures are embedded in our residences and university spaces. These have no place in a diverse, multicultural, and multilingual university and broader society.

The Transformation Forum in partnership with the SU Transformation Office, therefore, recommends the following practical steps for the way forward:

1. We call for a transparent SU statement detailing **the disciplinary procedure** of the incident in Huis Marais that includes timelines and an explanation of the process. Timeous updates are also needed to ensure accountability.
2. It is crucial that training for all House Committees, including Huis Marais, should include robust **critical diversity literacy and gender non-violence training**.
3. As DSaf staff, we need to develop an **appreciation for the lived experience** of students and staff of *all* backgrounds, so that we are adequately equipped to engage with diversity and inclusivity matters. Therefore, there is a need to create a **safe space for DSaf staff to debrief** on incidents of racism, gender-based violence, other forms of discrimination and the power hierarchy imbalances at SU.
4. As per the feedback from the DSaf Transformation Summit on 11 March 2022, DSaf **management should immediately address issues** brought to them when repeatedly raised and not addressed at other levels.
5. As per the **DSaf Transformation Charter Addendum² recommendations**, the DSaf Transformation Charter “should be part of the Welcome pack for newcomers (new students)”.
6. **Consult the SU Transformation Office** in planning DSaf co-curricular and staff development interventions.
7. We call for the creation of a **commission of inquiry** to explore racism, other forms of discrimination, and gender-based violence that remain deeply embedded at SU with a view to systemic change.
8. We call for a commitment from the Rectorate for tangible steps towards transformation in the form of an **SU Transformation Policy** that accompanies a Transformation plan with measurable indicators that hold various environments responsible for decolonisation and transformation of SU at all levels.
9. We call for the **Rectorate to reflect and hold itself accountable for the reversal of its decisions taken in 2020** with regards to restructuring and transforming Huis Marais.

²[Addendum to the DSaf Transformation Charter](#)