

STUDENTERAAD
STUDENTS'
REPRESENTATIVE
COUNCIL

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STUDENTS' REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL
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Constitutional Responsibilities

As Chapter 6 Section 77 of the Student Constitution states, the Academic Affairs Council (AAC) is responsible for promoting the rights of students in Chapter 2, but more specifically in Section 8(2) for quality education, academic support and transparent and justifiable assessment procedures. Thus, the curriculum and co-curriculum activities and their intersection falls under the support structure of the (AAC).

Portfolio Overview

The AAC Chairperson is an Ex-Officio Member on the SRC. Which focuses on ensuring academic success and excellence as the main driver, as well as coordinating the interaction between the SRC and the faculties. Its three responsibility areas are Academics, Co-Curricular Activities and Research.

For Stellenbosch University (SU), this leads to the AAC being the main body where Faculty Committees (Student Representation at a Faculty Level) are able to coordinate activities and create a cooperative system that allows for faculties to interact, and through the AAC to be represented at an Institutional level.

Within the South African context, the AAC is a body that can actively promote the improvement of higher education systems throughout the country through academic, co-curricular and research.





Committees / Task Teams

SRC Executive Committee

Senate: The highest decision-making body of the University for Academic and Research decisions. It is thus vital for the AAC to be present.

Quality Assurance Committee: The Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance (APQ) coordinates the quality assurance processes at Stellenbosch University and manages the secretariat function for the Quality Committee, which reports to the Executive Committee of Senate.

Academic Planning Committee: It is responsible for final decisions revolving around academic planning for the University. It reports directly to Senate. This committee focuses on topics such as new research centres, programme changes and so forth.

Co-Curriculum Committee: It is the committee responsible for accrediting co-curricular activities at the University.

ICBC Subcommittee for Online Learning & Assessment: This subcommittee is responsible for the swift transition from contact classes to online learning, ensuring that the process is successful and that the transition is beneficial for all those affected.

ICBC Learning & Teaching Workstream: Coordinate SU's efforts to continue with Learning and Teaching (L&T), as well as student and lecturer support under the COVID-19 pandemic. Do scenario planning for L&T. Do Risk management and determining risk appetite. Report to and refer SU institutional level decisions to the ICBC (Executive) level where needed. Help to prepare Institutional level communications regarding SU management of L&T, student and lecturer support.





Budget Overview

Budget of the Academic Affairs Council 2019/2020		
INCOME	Budget	Actual
2018/2019 Faculty Committee Fees	R 39 927,00	R 26 240,00
2019/2020 Faculty Committee Fees	R 43 400,00	R 5 743,00
SRC Contribution	R 55 627,38	R 55 627,38
Other		R 35 807,08
Total INCOME	R 138 954,38	R 123 417,46
EXPENDITURE		
AAC Day	R 20 000,00	R 22 196,56
2018/2019 Executive Honorarium	R 12 000,00	R 10 677,00
2019/2020 Executive Honorarium	R 12 000,00	
Inter-faculty Fund	R 15 000,00	
Leadership Development**	R 13 750,00	
Covid-19 Fund***	R 3 000,00	
Training Camp and Team Building	R 36 000,00	R 46 120,00
Sundry	R 1 650,00	
Year-End Function****	R 6 600,00	
Total EXPENDITURE	R 120 000,00	R 78 993,56





NET BALANCE

R 18 954,38

R 44 423,90

**Inclusive of marketing and rebranding merchandise*

***FVZS Course cost of R625 each.*

****Mainly for data costs incurred while attending to AAC duties, also for direct Covid-19 initiatives.*

*****R300 per person (N/A in 2020)*

Year Overview

1. Help Desk Initiative

This is the first initiative that the council initiated in its term in October 2019. The Help Desk is a resource intended initiative by the AAC with the aim of providing students with a platform to offer information and support related to topics regarding HEMIS, Dean's Concession Exams and Readmission (*these were the main things addressed considering that time of the year*) and any academic related concerns. The main reason the council suggested this initiative, was based on the assumption that information particularly relating to HEMIS, Dean's Concession Exams and Readmission did not reach students timeously. So, in order to remedy such a situation, the council came up with this idea in an effort of ensuring that the information explicitly reached the students.

The Help Desk was held on 24 October 2019 on the Rooiplein while there were also setups at the Engineering and Theology faculties (due to location). The council members as well as their faculty committee members were present throughout the day, answering all queries brought forth by students. The initiative was a success and allowed the AAC to continue sharing the information with students via its social media platforms.





2. Readmission Appeals

The overall readmission appeals process was smooth, seldomly there being issues which mostly resulted from miscommunication which were resolved. As the Chairperson of the AAC I availed myself via email as well as for face-to-face interactions with students who needed assistance regarding the appeals process since December 2019 till the last deadline which was on 6 January 2020.

In line with what my predecessor mentioned in his final term report: *“The Registrar and Institutional Readmission Appeals Committee (I-RAC) Chair have agreed to the need for students on the readmission appeals committees”*. I decided to do a follow-up which led to a meeting with Dr Ronel Retief (Registrar), Mr Ashmind Daniels (Deputy Registrar), Prof Louise Warnich (former I-RAC Chair) & Prof Reggie Nel (current I-RAC Chair) discussing the feasibility of having student representation on the various faculty readmission appeals committees (RACs). Simplified, the outcome of the meeting was: the committees will consider first a pilot project of student representation, with each committee having one student representative whom was to be a postgraduate student. Considering the limited time, only three faculties (Science, Agri Science & Theology) were able to accommodate the pilot project of having student representation on their RACs.

Three students were identified to serve on the committees, all being postgraduate students serving on the student faculty committees as Postgraduate Representatives. Led by Prof Warnich, training for the students was held before they commenced with their duties. At the training, there was representation from the Centre for Counselling and Student Development and the Registrar’s office with the Registrar present as well.





What is important to note is that even though the students were present at the above-mentioned committees, theirs was to simply observe as this was a pilot project. It is also worth mentioning that all three of the student representatives signed a Non-Disclosure agreement which none violated.

The students each compiled a report on student representation on the RACs (*the reports will be made available to the student populous in due time*). These reports have been shared with the Registrar and I-RAC Chairperson. What is to follow is discussions on how student representation on RACs will be formalised, those discussions are currently underway. However, the overall impression from the student representatives was that it is essential that all RACs have student representatives.

Moving forward the incoming AAC will engage with the Registrar on the possible amending of the SU HEMIS regulations. The understanding is that the current system may be too strict and that there is a need to amend it accordingly to give students an opportunity and chance to flexibly figure out their academic careers with limited stress of the HEMIS regulations.

3. Registration Campaign Workshop

The Registration Campaign Workshop was set up to ensure the following:

- To understand registration processes.
- To expose staff and student leaders on the ecosystem of support that is available to channel enquiries, concerns and grievances.
- To form a working relationship between the support staff in the faculties, Student Access, Student Affairs, Registrar's Division, International Office, Postgraduate Office and the student leaders.





All relevant stakeholders (student and staff members) were invited to partake in this initiative. All crucial divisions such as and not limited to Academic Counselling and Support; Finance, Bursaries and Loans; Accommodation and the SRC – explained what role they play during the registration period, how this was going to look like in 2020 and what kind of support they required from all those involved in the registration period. The workshop was a great success, with many who attended finding it useful and necessary.

My main involvement in the workshop was highlighting the SRC's ecosystem of support – covering mainly what was to be available as well as the programme of action from the SRC's side.

4. Leadership Training and Development

In order to ensure that the AAC executes its duties effectively and to the satisfaction of the student populous it is of paramount importance that the council members are equipped with the necessary skills and leadership proficiency. As a result, a weekend of learning, equipping and connecting was organised for the AAC members early in February 2020. The topics covered were those such as our Vision and Mission, Higher Education Context in SA, Constitutional Literacy, Creating Co-Curriculum Programmes, Financial Management, Substance Abuse and Team Building amongst many.

The outcome of this training and development focused weekend resulted in the effective work that the council has carried out thus far in its term. Guided by our values:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Integrity
- Compassion





- Discernment

the AAC continues to show that it prides itself in representing the academic interest of all students at Stellenbosch University through a collaborative effort and this has filtered down to the various faculty committees which the council members lead.

5. Council Rebranding

The council recognised the need of using the English version of the Academic Affairs Council acronym “AAC” more and in conjunction with the Afrikaans acronym “ABR” (meaning *Akademiese Belangraad*). This decision was informed by the fact that majority of students did not recognise the council simply because they did not understand from its name what it was and what it represents, as a result of a language barrier.

Overall, the council rebranding has been successful in that many students now know more about the AAC and more importantly the work that the council does. The effective utilisation of our social media platforms has assisted accordingly in this successful shift.

6. Class Representatives' Training

In the past, the AAC held a training session which all class representatives from all faculties attended. Upon discussing the effectiveness of such an approach with relevant stakeholders; the best option was from this year onwards each faculty hosts their own class representative training at which the Chairperson or Vice Chairperson of the AAC will make a presentation. The main communication which had to be conveyed from the AAC to the class representatives was mainly the purpose of a class representative, what the link between class representatives and





the AAC is and lastly what the grievance procedure relating to academic issues was and how that process looks like. All trainings were a success, with day-to-day administration of the class representatives being managed by the relevant people in the various faculty committees.

7. Academic Guardian Project

The AAC initiated this project because it realised that institutional academic related information does not reach students timeously. In order to remedy this, all residences and PSOs on the Stellenbosch campus received an Academic Guardian (an AAC member) to ensure that any important reaches students easily and on time. The project is simply the AAC offering support to the student populous. It is important to note that upon consultation with the relevant Tygerberg student leaders, a similar project is already underway which meant there was no need of allocating guardians to the Tygerberg campus. The AAC Chairperson is the guardian to the Military Campus.

Through the project the AAC hopes to offer advice regarding academic issues, share institutional information that is academic-related and promote relations between students and the AAC.

8. AAC Day

Often the general student populous commented that the presence of the AAC was not felt, particularly visual presence. The AAC dedicated a day (28 February 2020) whereby it engaged with students on the Rooiplein on a variety of things such as academic related queries and just general chats while having a fun time. There was a lot of AAC merchandise which was given away to students while in return them following the AAC on its social media platforms. The day ended with a flash





mob which was not only done by the AAC members but also members of the various faculty committees. The students enjoyed the engagement, highlighting their appreciation of the AAC showing its 'fun' side and allowing its members to meet and engage with students beyond academics.

9. Covid-19 response

Amidst the uncertainty brought about by the Covid-19 outbreak, the main focus then became the transition towards online learning. Cognisant of the many concerns arising about the transition mainly concerning access; it is important that students understand that the AAC is doing all it can to ensure that no student is left out when the transition comes to fruition. The AAC Chairperson serves on the ICBC Subcommittee for Online Learning & Assessment – championing all the concerns that students have raised thus far.

Much of our duty as a council was to provide “on the ground feedback” from students to ensure that whatever mechanisms were put in place directly benefitted the students. Often the faculty committees were responsible for writing up memorandums on faculty specific issues that they were facing along with possible solutions. The class representatives played a fundamental role in providing module specific information, this way we were able to address most of the issues that came up.

Early in the year the Tygerberg chairpersons (TAAC) were also included in the ACC, ensuring that the AAC Chairperson was always informed of Tygerberg specific issues as well as ensuring their intentional inclusion. The academic year went on as per normal at the Military Academy, the main contact to assist in any academic affairs was the Student Captain.





Throughout the year, all planned activities by the faculty committees and the AAC were put on hold so that much of our efforts were directed towards assisting students with the transition towards online learning. The social media platforms offered opportunity in that they were utilised to spread information and do live sessions to directly engage with students.

10. Financial Tips for Graduates session

A financial session themed “Financial Tips for Graduates” was organised and facilitated by the council’s Treasurer. This talk was aimed to assist students with the financial transition from graduate to working professional. The talk was presented online by a financial advisor from Discovery and accounted via Microsoft Teams.

11. Rector’s Awards for Excellent Achievement

In accordance with Stellenbosch University’s (SU) pursuit of excellence and its aim to improve significantly, it is important that appropriate instruments of recognition be used to encourage students to excel. In July 2008, the Rector’s Management Team in collaboration with the SRC decided to host an annual prestige event during which recognition would be accorded to students who performed outstandingly in academics, sport, service provision, leadership, culture and social impact. The award received by the recipient is known as the Rector’s Award for Excellent Achievement.

This year the celebration of the event will be hosted virtually for the first time ever. The AAC Chairperson is one of the event’s project leaders and representative from the SRC. All processes leading up to the event were successful and the virtual experience promises to be a fruitful one.





Important Contacts.

- Sharine Dowries – sharine@sun.ac.za (*Student Governance*)
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- Gershwin Fritz – gfritz@sun.ac.za (*Student Governance*)
- Dr Ronel Retief – ronelretief@sun.ac.za (*Registrar*)
- Prof Louise Warnich – lw@sun.ac.za (*Dean: Science*)
- Prof Reggie Nel – rwnel@sun.ac.za (*I-RAC Chairperson & Dean: Theology*)
- Prof Arnold Schoonwinkel – schoonwi@sun.ac.za (*Vice Rector: Learning & Teaching*)
- Kate Roodt – kateroodt@sun.ac.za (*Co-Curriculum Coordinator - CSLS*)
- Charlene Wicomb – wicomb@sun.ac.za (*Matie Shop*)

