

Stellenbosch University

CLASS REP
HANDBOOK

*Information adapted from University of Ulster handbook**

FROM THE RECTOR

DEAR CLASS REPRESENTATIVE

Well done with being elected to this position! It means you have put up your hand to promote academic excellence, and your class mates have chosen you to represent them in this quest. Student success is a priority for Stellenbosch University. We aim to provide all Maties with every opportunity to achieve their full potential, and you can help us achieve this goal.

The four main attributes that we encourage for all our students is to have enquiring minds, be engaged citizens, become dynamic professionals and develop into well-rounded individuals. As a Class Rep you are well placed to guide the learning process, so allow me to expand briefly.

To have an *enquiring mind* requires critical and creative thinking. But it starts with the will to learn and to put your knowledge to good use. This should not end the day you graduate but continue throughout your life. To be an *engaged citizen* means taking leadership, but doing so in collaboration with others. An entrepreneurial attitude can help us to tackle societal challenges. And we need to be effective in diverse environments. To be a *dynamic professional* one day, you have to master the knowledge base of your chosen field. But also acquire skills that go beyond boundaries like being a problem solver and **always** remaining innovative. To become a *well-rounded individual* you have to experience life in all its richness. Seek out exposure to cultural, intellectual and sporting activities beyond the classroom. And learn to take informed and well considered decisions.

Being a Matie is an amazing opportunity, but we all have to take full responsibility for making the most our time here.

Best wishes
Prof Wim de Villiers



VAN DIE REKTOR

BESTE KLASVERTEENWOORDIGER

Geluk met jou verkiesing! Dit beteken dat jy jou bereid verklaar het om akademiese uitnemendheid te bevorder en dat jou klasmaats jou gekies het om hulle te verteenwoordig. Studentesukses is 'n prioriteit vir die Universiteit Stellenbosch. Ons wil graag alle Maties elke maandelike geleentheid bied om hul volle potensiaal te verwesenlik, en jy kan ons hierdie doel help bereik.

Die vier hoofkenmerke wat ons by al ons studente aanmoedig, is om 'n ondersoekende gees te hê, betrokke burgers te wees, en te ontwikkel as dinamiese beroepslui en afgeronde individue. As klasverteenvoorder is jy goed geplaas om die leerproses in hierdie rigting te lei – kom ek verduidelik kortliks.

Om 'n ondersoekende gees te hê vereis kritiese en kreatiewe denke. Maar dit begin by die wil om te leer en goeie gebruik van jou kennis te maak. Dit behoort nie op jou gradedag te stop nie, maar moet lewenslank voortduur. Om 'n betrokke burger te wees verg leierskap, maar in samewerking met ander. 'n Entrepreneursingesteldheid kan ons die uitdagings van die samelewing help hanteer. Boonop moet ons doeltreffend in diverse omgewings kan funksioneer. Om eendag 'n dinamiese beroepspersoon te wees, moet jy die vakkennis van jou gekose gebied bemeester. Tog moet jy ook ander, algemene vaardighede aanleer – soos om 'n probleemoplosser te wees en altyd vernuwend te dink. Om 'n afgeronde individu te word, moet jy die lewe in al sy rykheid ervaar. Stel jou doelbewus aan kulturele, intellektuele en sportaktiwiteite buite die klaskamer bloot. En leer om ingeligte en goed deurdagte besluite te neem.

Dis 'n ongelooflike geleentheid om 'n Matie te wees, maar ons almal moet volle verantwoordelikheid aanvaar om ons tyd hier so goed maandelik te benut.

Vriendelike groete
Prof Wim de Villiers



THE AAC

A BRIEF INTRO

The Academic Affairs Council (AAC) of Stellenbosch University is the representative student body that takes care of the academic affairs of students in an environment that is devoted to excellence. The activities of the AAC are aimed at representing students and promoting academic interests as well as facilitating the participation and development of students in the academic domain and in this manner serves as a key link between the faculty committees.

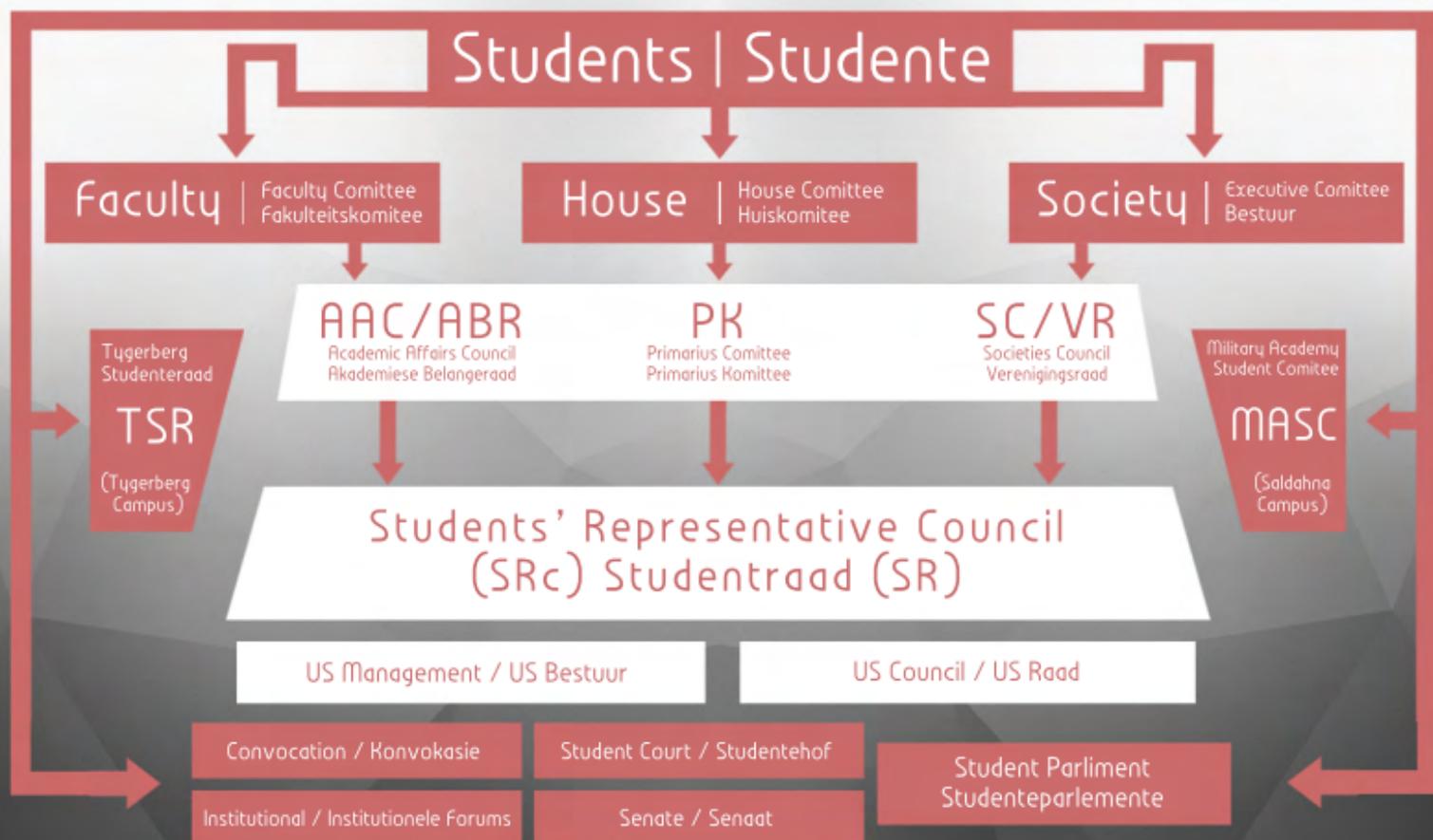
THE AAC

A BRIEF INTRO *CONT.*

The AAC consists of two representatives from each of the faculties of Stellenbosch University (excluding Military Science). The chair represents the body on the Student Representative Council (SRC). The AAC's sole mandate is to protect and represent the academic affairs of undergraduate students. Due to the nature of the AAC's role on the campus, members serve on a variety of committees of the University. This gives the AAC an important role in policy-making and decision-making structures of the university.

The AAC, in cooperation with faculty committees, serves as a support structure to undergraduate students. They assist students who encounter problems within the academic domain. The AAC also initiates projects that encourage excellence in students' academic performance. In 2011, for example, the AAC awarded trophies to residences that excelled at their academics. Each year the AAC also has a project that is focussed on raising the awareness of first year students with regard to academic assessment.

HOW ARE YOU REPRESENTED? HOE WORD JY VERTEENWOORDIG?



VISION

**WE CONTINUOUSLY STRIVE TOWARDS
REALISING OUR VISION THROUGH:**

- ♦ Maintaining effective and transparent communication between students, student leadership and management
- ♦ Promoting students' awareness of various resources and supporting structures available to them
- ♦ Protecting, maintaining and promoting the academic integrity of the University
- ♦ Encouraging thought leadership through sustainable initiatives that promotes personal development
- ♦ Being accountable, accessible and visible leaders who represent all students

STUDENT REPRESENTATION

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

The University aims to ensure that all students have an educational experience which is both valuable and enjoyable.

To ensure that this commitment is met it is important that the University receives regular feedback from the student population. Class Reps, supported by the Academic Affairs Council (ABR), are the main vehicle through which students can have a say over their own learning experience.

REPRESENTATION

1 - CLASS REPS

Class Reps are elected at course level to represent the views of students who are their course colleagues. They are usually the first point of contact for most students in regard to issues, concerns and questions about the course they're studying. Class Reps are the means through which students can comment on things that work well, provide constructive criticism of things that don't work so well and offer suggestions on areas for consideration for their course. The ultimate aim is to ensure the continual improvement of the student learning experience which is achieved through effective communication between Students, the University and the ABR.

As a Class Rep you play an essential role in the student feedback process by ensuring that the University listens to the voice of its students and acts upon the information that it is given. During your time as a Class Rep, you will relay the comments, questions and concerns of your fellow students to the Academic Staff who can make changes happen. In addition, the Class Rep will feedback information to the ABR and relay information from the ABR back to students on their course. This is achieved via the bi-annual Mass Information Meetings (MIMs) where those in attendance will get the opportunity to receive updates and to give feedback on academic issues.

REPRESENTATION

2 - FACULTY COMMITTEES

Faculty Committees provide student representatives with greater contact with, and access to, senior faculty members to influence decisions that will affect students at the University of Stellenbosch. The issues that class reps raise at MIMs will be taken by the Faculty Committees to this arena. In addition, the ABR sits on a host of other high level committees and can use these as a platform to ensure student views are heard.

Info on Faculty Committees can be found later in this booklet.

REPRESENTATION

3 - ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Class Reps are elected at course level to represent the views of students who are their course colleagues. They are usually on an overall, or campus level, the Students' Union is responsible for obtaining and representing student opinion. The ABR is elected indirectly by all students, and act as the representatives of students' views on overall University committees.

If you are interested in a position on a Faculty Committee or the ABR, contact your respective faculty committee for more details.

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

THE ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CLASS REPRESENTATIVE

As a Class Rep you will have to carry out certain tasks in order to be effective and successful in your role.

Training will be provided by the Academic Affairs Council. Should you experience any difficulties you can contact the Faculty Committee (see useful contacts section for details).

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

TASK 1: IDENTIFY YOURSELF TO THE GROUP OF STUDENTS YOU REPRESENT

Why? So that students are aware that there is a class representative system, that you are their representative and if they have issues (positive and negative) they should give their feedback to you.

How? As Class Reps should be elected, by their course colleagues, most people will know who you are. In any event it does no harm to introduce yourself in lectures as the class rep just in case someone was absent. Make use of posters, notice boards, emails, and chatting at coffee breaks to get the word out!

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

TASK 2: ATTEND ABR TRAINING AND MEETINGS

Why? So that you can find out about what you are meant to be doing and how to go about it. The ABR will hold training and meetings, so please attend as they will provide more information about the student experience and ensure the continuous improvement of it.

How? You can contact your respective Faculty Committee for more information with regards to the training, or you can consult the ABR's Facebook Page for updated information.

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

TASK 3: TO KEEP AN EYE ON THE STATED AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF YOUR COURSE

Why? To ensure that you and your course colleagues receive quality teaching and that the stated aims and objectives of your course are being addressed.

How? Ask your course colleagues to provide you with feedback which you should then communicate to your lecturers/Faculty Committee. They will be grateful to learn if their teaching and the course is meeting expectations, and if not – how this can be addressed.

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

TASK 4: IDENTIFY STUDENT ISSUES AND NEEDS

Why? As mentioned above the role of the class rep is to provide the Faculty with information that is representative of the entire student body on the course, not merely individual opinions. As a Class Rep you must identify the issues and needs of your course colleagues.

How? A series of suggestions entitled “Effective Communication with your course colleagues” can be found in the resources section in this handbook, and gives helpful tips as to how you might identify the issues and needs of students on your course. It’s all about communication! Remember the sooner you start communicating with class colleagues the more information you will gather.

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

TASK 5: REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF CLASS COLLEAGUES EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T PERSONALLY AGREE WITH THEM

Why? In life we may find ourselves in minorities – some of us more than others. When representing the views of the entire course cohort it is likely that on some issues you will be in a minority. It's your job is to represent your course colleagues views even if you don't necessarily agree with them.

How? If it is clear that a number of students have an issue or concern about the course, or are experiencing aspects of the course differently to you then find out why. If it is an issue that needs to be progressed then it may help to take notes.

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

TASK 6: LIAISE WITH THE ABR/FACULTY COMMITTEE AND ATTEND THE MIMs

Why? The ABR can only identify issues that are affecting different Faculties if you tell them what they are, however, bear in mind that it may be that these are issues where the senior management of the University needs to take action. The ABR will provide student representation through the full time officers, who sit on the major University committees, and will therefore be able to raise these issues there on your behalf.

How? The MIMs are a good mechanism through which you can ensure the ABR is aware of what's going on in your course. (You will be informed of the venue and dates for these meetings). Alternatively you can contact your Faculty Committees directly.

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

TASK 7: HELP TO ENSURE THAT THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE IS CONSIDERED IN ALL DECISIONS

Why? Remember as a student you are the expert on the student experience on your course or in your Faculty, so consult with your course colleagues and give feedback to the academic staff.

How? If a major decision is being taken in which you feel that there should be greater student involvement in, don't be afraid to say so and ask the Faculty what it can do to ensure consultation with more students. Equally, if you feel you should be involved in decisions, which you are currently not, then don't be afraid to suggest this.

YOUR ROLE AS CLASS REP

TASK 8: REFER MAJOR ISSUES AND INDIVIDUAL CASES TO THE ABR (I.E. ACADEMIC APPEALS) OR OTHER APPROPRIATE SERVICES

Why? As a Class Rep there are some issues (namely, personal, disciplinary, disputes & appeal matters) that you should not become involved with, because you have a limited amount of time and there are other services available that have a core duty to provide guidance, support and advice.

How? If you are approached with such an issue please refer the person to the appropriate service. If you are in doubt about making a referral please contact your Faculty Committee who will do so on your behalf, or take a look at the section entitled "People a Class Rep can approach".

ISSUES A CLASS REP MAY ENCOUNTER

Students from your course may approach you with a wide range of questions. Remember if the question is not within your remit you should refer your course colleague to an appropriate person within the ABR or University. Your job as a Class Rep is to ensure that any problems your course colleagues encounter in their studies can be raised and resolved through the correct and appropriate channels. Students have a right to expect quality teaching and also the resources and facilities to facilitate their learning.

The type of issues that you can raise, on behalf of your course colleagues, can be spilt into three different areas:

- ♦ *Commenting on things that work well on the course*
- ♦ *Constructive criticism on things that didn't or don't work so well on your course*
- ♦ *Suggestions on new areas to consider on the course.*

ISSUES A CLASS REP MAY ENCOUNTER

Curriculum Issues

- ♦ Are the learning outcomes being met?
- ♦ What is the match between expectations of students, the learning outcomes and curriculum content?
- ♦ Does the curriculum content encourage the development of knowledge and skills?
- ♦ How relevant is the course to future study and employment?

Teaching and Learning Issues

- ♦ Is the range of teaching and learning methods appropriate for delivering your curriculum?
- ♦ Should there be more lectures, labs or tutorials?
- ♦ What teaching methods would students find more appropriate for your course?
- ♦ Is the language in the classroom in agreement with the Faculty Yearbook?

ISSUES A CLASS REP MAY ENCOUNTER

Student Representation Issues

- ♦ Are students aware of the role of the Class representative?
- ♦ Do they understand the mechanism of representation throughout the Students' Union and University?
- ♦ Do Students explicitly understand and know about the transferable skills they can acquire as a Class Representative?

Issues Relating to Learning Resources

- ♦ How do you rate the on-course support provided to you?
- ♦ Are appropriate library services available?
- ♦ Are the texts on the reading list readily available?
- ♦ Which texts on the reading lists were really useful?
- ♦ Is there ready access to computer facilities? Is the software you are expected to use matched to your course needs and are you trained how to use it, if necessary?
- ♦ What are the most helpful learning resources provided for your course?
- ♦ Are the necessary programme specific materials and resources available?
- ♦ Is the accommodation and equipment that is used for your course adequate?

ISSUES A CLASS REP MAY ENCOUNTER

Issues Relating to Assessment

- ♦ Do you understand the criteria for assessment and the methods used?
- ♦ What feedback do you receive? Is it prompt and effective?
- ♦ Is the assessment policy and practice clearly described?
- ♦ Could the timing for submission of coursework be reviewed? Is it too close to exams?
- ♦ Is there an unreasonable delay in the return of marked assignments?
- ♦ Are the comments made on marked assignments helpful?

Teaching and Learning Issues

- ♦ Are course evaluation forms used and collected?
- ♦ Is such evaluation acted upon?
- ♦ Do you consider that student views are influential?
Can you provide any examples?

ISSUES A CLASS REP SHOULD NOT DEAL WITH

With course work, extracurricular activities and employment, students have a lot to fit into the average week during term-time. For this reason it is very important that Class Reps do not undertake more tasks than they need to.

There are some issues that a class rep should not deal with. If students approach you about these issues you should pass them onto the ABR officers, Student Support Services or academic staff within your Faculty. See useful contacts.

ISSUES A CLASS REP SHOULD NOT DEAL WITH

DO NOT BE TEMPTED TO GET INVOLVED IN:

- ♦ Disputes between students and academic staff, and between individual students (for example, harassment, discrimination and victimisation)
- ♦ Formal procedures (for example, exam failures, academic appeals, individual complaints, disciplinary hearings, etc.)
- ♦ Financial and funding queries including debt
- ♦ Welfare problems, health and personal issues (for example, housing, employment and immigration)
- ♦ Exam and results appeals

Your initial reaction may be to help the individual, however, it should be recognised that all these issues require some expertise and in depth training to ensure that the best advice and assistance is provided. It is suggested that you do not attempt to help individuals approaching you on these matters. These sorts of issues can be really time consuming and complex so don't feel bad about referring someone onto a source of information who has agreed to provide such support, such as the ABR and Faculty Committees.

Always get the student's consent if you need to discuss a case with someone else, or refer it. If you do decide to refer a student elsewhere explain to them why you are doing so and give them the opportunity to ask any questions and/or voice any concerns.

HANDLING STUDENT COMPLAINTS

An important part of being a Class Rep is receiving feedback from students. Inevitably, some of the feedback you receive will be complaints and it is important that you listen and respond to them. Not all complaints are satisfactorily resolved. If a student approaches you with an unresolved complaint, you should refer them to the ABR's Student Complaints Procedure.

Information on the Student Complaints Procedure can be found by contacting your Faculty Committee.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

COMMUNICATION WITH COURSE COLLEAGUES

One of the things that many class reps experience as the most difficult aspect of their job is finding an effective way of communicating with their course colleagues. Whatever method you use to communicate it is useful to bear in mind these three issues.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

1 - WHY SHOULD STUDENTS COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR CLASS REP?

Many students will not communicate with their class reps because they don't properly understand what a course representative does. You will need to explain what it is you do, namely that students can approach you with positive and negative points about the course they are taking and that you will pass the information onto the course leaders so that they can address the issues raised.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

2. WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES SPEAKING TO A CLASS REP MAKE?

This is a question that other students implicitly answer in the negative if they have issues with their course but don't come to speak to you about it. If students don't believe that the class representative system works, or that it makes a difference to their learning experience, then a vicious circle starts with more and more students feeling that the system doesn't address their concerns.

This has an effect on how representative of your class colleagues you can be at meetings. It is important therefore that you and if you can persuade them, academic staff encourage student comments by providing means to help them communicate with you. This means that you can demonstrate to others that speaking to a course rep can make a difference.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

3 - HOW SHOULD I COMMUNICATE WITH COURSE COLLEAGUES?

This too is a question that most class representatives ask at some point when they are struggling with how to find out what the course issues are. Here are some suggestions which are aimed at helping you find out information as quickly and easily as possible. Remember the sooner you start communicating with class colleagues the more information you will gather.

- *Ask your lecturer or tutor to give you a few minutes at the start or the end of a class so you can explain what it is a course representative does and how students can contact you.*
- *At the beginning of a class give everyone a small sheet of paper and ask them to write one thing they think is going well about the course and one thing they think could be going better about the course. At the end of the class collect all the sheets of paper and feedback to academic staff.*

Don't underestimate the potential of coffee-breaks and chats before and after lectures or class nights out as opportunities to discuss issues that students may have. It is only natural that issues about your course will crop up as it is one of the things all have in common. Remember the best way to discover the views of your course colleagues is to be accessible and encourage them to approach you. Listening skills are very important, try not to interrupt people when they are talking to you. Take notes and then ask for clarification of anything you do not understand.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

3 - HOW SHOULD I COMMUNICATE WITH COURSE COLLEAGUES? CONT...

Whilst speaking to your course colleagues you will become aware of aspects that are perceived as negative or positive by others, but not necessarily by you. It is important when passing on this information to academic staff and the Students' Union that you are able to give them information that will assist them in using the feedback you have provided.

This often means giving more than a simple list of strengths and weaknesses about a course. The following questions will assist you in collecting more information and hopefully get a better grasp of the issues you may be asked to communicate:

What is the issue?

Try and spell out as simply as possible what is wrong or right about the course.

Why is this an issue?

It affects teaching quality through or impacts on the ability to learn because...

How do you know it is an issue?

Try and spell out as simply as possible what is wrong or right about the course.

Who does the issue affect?

Different year groups, undergraduates, taught and/or research postgraduates, males, females, home or international students, mature students, campus-based students...

Where is this an issue?

In one module / programme / year / the whole faculty / university / regional or national.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

COMMUNICATION AND NEGOTIATION WITH ACADEMIC STAFF

To represent students effectively it is important to develop good communication and negotiation skills. Remember informal routes of negotiation can sometimes be the most successful. Try to solve problems at the lowest level possible, i.e. in the first instance speak informally to lecturers on the module/course.

Class Reps sometimes think or feel that it is a “them and us” situation, the students vs. staff. Usually this does not have to be the case, and the best results are achieved by students and staff working together in partnership. Try to ensure that when speaking as a Class Rep that you are actually being representative of the majority of students on your course. Check this out by checking base with them for five minutes before or after a lecture to ensure that you have a good understanding of the issues you have been asked to raise.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

REMEMBER!

The main reason the University of Stellenbosch has class representatives is so that students can contribute to the improvement of courses and degrees. Academic teaching and support staff are committed to their jobs and equally want to see an improvement to the courses they work on. You will not be expected to have the skills of a diplomat when negotiating at meetings, however, if you know that a major issue is coming up which is important to students you should set aside some preparation time.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

MANAGING CONFLICT

During your time as a Class Rep you may find yourself facing angry, upset or frustrated students who are unhappy with a University decision that affects them. It is important to remember that in these situations the negative emotion is neither personal nor, in reality, directed against you. Don't lose your temper or antagonise the situation in any way, and follow the following five step conflict management framework.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

FIVE STEP CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK:

Step One

Conflict needs to be confronted assertively not aggressively.

Look before you leap and think about what you are trying to achieve before confronting the other person.

Step Two

Step into the other persons shoes as this will help you make sense of the problem and ascertain whether this is a conflict situation or a series of misunderstandings. It will enable you to start identifying the real issues whilst showing respect for the other person.

Step Three

Try to arrive at a mutually acceptable definition of the problem.

The course of conflict can be destructive if both parties persist in a combative approach to the definition of problems.

Step Four

Undertake a collaborative search for mutually acceptable solutions.

Step five

Make sure that each of you has ownership of the agreement, as this way it is less likely to be broken. Make agreements which involve clear and unambiguous communication.

BENEFITS OF BEING A CLASS REP

As a Class Rep, as well as improving your fellow students' experience at University, you will gain valuable experience and key skills. These skills and experience will enhance your future employability.

Remember that today's employers aren't just looking for someone with a qualification; they require a whole range of additional skills and experience before considering someone for a job. Being a Class Rep will ensure that you have an edge above the masses!

BENEFITS OF BEING A CLASS REP

Research has shown the following skills that are of particular interest to employers, and these skills are definitely required to be an effective Class Rep:

- ♦ Leadership Skills
- ♦ Team Work
- ♦ Communication
- ♦ Project Management
- ♦ Problem Solving
- ♦ Lobbying
- ♦ Negotiation
- ♦ Committee/Meeting Skills
- ♦ Report Writing
- ♦ Advocacy
- ♦ Time Management

In addition there a lot of other benefits such as:

- ♦ Making new friends
- ♦ Partnership working
- ♦ Influencing decisions
- ♦ Greater ownership
- ♦ Having a voice
- ♦ Feeling valued
- ♦ Making a positive impact on your course
- ♦ Enhancing and improving the student learning experience

THINGS TO REMEMBER

LEGITIMACY OF THE CLASS REP ROLE

Class Reps have an authority and legitimacy that is given to them by their student colleagues when they elect them. The authority given is that you shall act as their official spokesperson and representative on issues affecting their course. It is reasonable therefore for your course colleagues to have a means through which they can make you aware of their views and of monitoring the representation you make on their behalf. Remember to feedback to your course colleagues and keep the Students' Union informed of the issues you are raising on behalf of your course colleagues.

In addition the role of course rep is recognised by the University of Stellenbosch and the ABR. Representation is acknowledged by all these bodies as being crucial to the continual improvement of the student learning experience.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

CONFIDENTIALITY

It is vital that ALL Class Reps respect fellow students by treating the information they receive as confidential. If a student's issue requires you, as a Class Rep, to talk to a third party, you should always gain the student's consent first.

AGRISCIENCES STUDENT COMMITTEE

CONTACT US

Name	Portfolio	Contact	Course
Johanet vd Merwe	Treasurer	17111374@sun.ac.za	Bsc Veekunde (met Agronomie)
Stefan Links	Community Interaction	17945356@sun.ac.za	Bsc Plant Pathology and Genetics
Jodi Pieterse	Marketing	17118565@sun.ac.za	Bsc Conservation Ecology and Entomology
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NATURAL SCIENCES STUDENT COMMITTEE

CONTACT US

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BA STUDENT COMMITTEE

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JURIDICAL SOCIETY

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ENGINEERING STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

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EDUCATION STUDENT COMMITTEE

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