

Centre for Student Leadership, Experiential Education and Citizenship

Leadership Summit for Aspiring Leaders (LSAL) 2023

"Cultivating the leader within US"

29 July 2023

Purpose Statement

Higher education institutions are defined as public interest institutions which serve the public good, and their research is granted status and credibility based on their "enlightenment inheritance" as guardians and creators of knowledge (Lynch, 2006:1). The creation of research and knowledge in higher education institutions serves part of the interchange of ideas in democratic societies, and seeks to protect freedom of thought, including the freedom to dissent from prevailing orthodoxies. [The historic operation and functioning of higher education institutions](#), like the South African higher education system prior to the South African constitutional democracy in April 1994, was segregated based on 'race', gender, ethnicity, class, geography, and characterized by racial, gender, and linguistic social inequalities (Badat 2010; Fiske and Ladd, 2004).

With the dawn of the new South African democratic dispensation in 1994, the South African government committed itself to create a more equitable society by reshaping and removing discriminatory and unjust institutional structures and practices that were specifically designed to privilege white educational institutions (Pattman and Carolissen, 2018). Although many inroads have been made to alleviate discriminatory and unjust practices in higher education, transformation within the Higher Education sector however, focused on issues such as student intake (access), throughput (retention), as well as white faculty within the institutions, at the expense of deeply interrogating institutional culture(s) and unbalanced power dynamics (Reddy 2006). Transformation of the South-African higher education system involves more than merely access and admission to institutions of higher learning (Adonis and Silinda, 2021). [Historically marginalized students attending](#)

Institutions of higher learning encounter a plethora of challenges, and struggle to adapt when attending historically white institutions, as they are confronted with an institutional culture that is neither receptive to their needs, nor representative of their culture¹... (Lourens, 2013).

Institutional 'cultures'² are entangled in hegemony, which are the "assumptions and values that shape meaning and define reality for the majority of people in a given culture" (Bressler, 2007:198). Hegemony ensures that culture continues its existence, thus, in institutions of higher learning, institutional cultures speak to the struggles between social forces (Fakhimi Anbaran, 2016:48). Badat alludes that higher education institutions will not realise the potential it has to transform and contribute to social justice and social change, if universities continue to be powerful mechanisms of social injustice and exclusion, through their internal thinking, structures, cultures and practices and their external conditioning by the broader society (Badat, 2010). Furthermore, the need to change institutional culture has been flagged as a barrier in the implementation of substantive and qualitative transformation in Higher Education (Adonis and Silinda, 2021).

Given the background above, we must understand 'students' and 'staff' in higher education institutions as individuals living in their culture, and the culture as lived by individuals. For Hutcheon, the formation of 'culture' passes through processes to create an institution, which eventually forms the ultimate structure of a culture (Fakhimi Anbaran, 2016:47). These processes within the higher education landscape speak to language and history as basic elements of culture(s), knowledge, policy, and the formal means through which socialisation occurs. With this said, what is the role of a student, as a stakeholder, at an institution of higher learning, and more specifically, Stellenbosch University, in shaping the institutional culture? Furthermore, what are the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within Stellenbosch University's institutional cultures for student leadership?

With the above- mentioned in mind, the focus of the 2023 Leadership Summit for Aspiring Leaders (LSAL) is to introduce participants to the concept as well as formation of culture, specifically relating to institutional culture, and its role in the operation and achievement

¹ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002) described culture as follows: "... culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs."

² Institutional culture is the sum-total effects of the values, attitudes, styles, interaction and collective memories of a university, known by those who work and study in the university environment through their lived experience. (Steyn, 2007).

of the goals of institutions of higher learning, specifically relating to inclusivity and diversity. LSAL further aims to unpack institutional culture as it relates to the understanding and practice of student leadership, and to explore the role of leaders in the formation of institutional leadership practices, and finally, the potential impact or not, if institutional cultures do not keep pace with student and institutional needs.

The aim of LSAL as an educational platform is to provide students with the tools to engage deeper on the process of change and reimagination of leadership and the practice of leadership within the context of Higher Education, in order to create a definition and experience of leadership and related concepts that is relevant, adaptable and grounded in student needs. The Social Change Model for Student Leadership will serve as the theoretical framework, and tool for participants while they engage in this process of change.

LSAL Objectives:

- 1) To unpack the conceptual underpinnings of 'culture' as a social construct, in order to identify the role that 'culture' plays, and could play, in shaping and defining the leadership landscape within the Higher Education landscape;
- 2) To explore and analyse, based on past leadership experiential practices, the prevalent customs, behaviours and values relating to student leadership, in order to identify challenges relating to the structure and performance of leadership practice within the Higher Education context;
- 3) To provide students with the tools to engage the processes of change, reimagination and practice of leadership within their context, so that students envision an institutional leadership 'culture' that is relevant, adaptable, consistent, and grounded in student needs.

LSAL Outcomes:

Upon completion of the Summit, participants will be able to:

- 1) Identify and explain the various underpinnings of culture as a social construct, within the student leadership space, towards developing an understanding of how culture shapes and is shaped by student leadership and leadership practices within the Higher Education landscape;
- 2) Provide examples of factors contributing towards current practices, customs, and values of leadership within higher education in order to formulate a shared understanding of cultural change that is needed within the student leadership space;
- 3) Formulate and facilitate the process of reimagining and developing leadership customs and behaviours, within their context, that are relevant and consistent to their (students) needs.