

Reflections on the SU Gender Indaba

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On 5 March 2020, the Division Student Affairs (DSAf), in collaboration with the Students for Law and Social Justice (SLSJ) Society hosted the first Stellenbosch University Gender Indaba. The Indaba aimed to create a space in which students and staff could discuss and find solutions to gender issues on campus. This was especially fitting not only because 8 March marked International Women's Day but also because South Africa has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence (GBV) in the world.

The Indaba was themed "Starting a journey of understanding" and had an interactive format. Prof. Amanda Gouws, SARChI Chair in Gender Politics in the SU Department of Political Science, Dr Claire Kelly, Faculty Programme Manager at the SU Transformation Office and Anthony Martin Andrews, former Speaker of Student Parliament and prominent student activist opened the Indaba with an insightful panel discussion. The event then facilitated several conversations in which groups rotated every 30 minutes to allow everyone to participate in different discussions with different group members. The topics for these conversations ranged from accommodation for non-binary persons at Stellenbosch University, structural challenges that contribute to GBV, and how different people experience safety on campus.

DSAf and SLSJ found it imperative to host this event as South Africa grapples with deep gender issues and as an educational space that prepares young people for further integration into wider society, the University is well-positioned to bring change on such matters. According to an article by Die Matie, some students shared the belief that such an engagement was necessary as the University is not always inclusive of those who do not fit into the gender binary. Some suggestions for the next Indaba include spreading these conversations to informal spaces as well so that students can join discussions on gender from an informed perspective. Overall, the event presented a welcomed learning opportunity and as such, it has been decided that it will occur annually.