

Division: Student Affairs **Transformation Charter**

Introduction

The Division Student Affairs (DSAf) acknowledges the privileged roots that Stellenbosch University (SU) has been borne out of. Many communities have been adversely affected by the previously forced separation and degradation of the majority of South Africans based on various factors including, apartheid, colonialism, and subsequently unequal access to education and resources. With reference to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, this Transformation Charter (the "Charter") therefore recognizes the importance of equity, inclusivity, universal access, and the lived experience of both the staff and students we serve.

Aligning the institutional culture of the university to serve the needs of a diverse student body is a key requirement for the university's transformation.

The aims of this Charter are to:

- (i) To create awareness around decolonization and transformation within DSAf;
- (ii) To foster an inclusive and supportive culture to facilitate intentional and purposeful engagement between stakeholders from various environments, i.e., students and staff, and the surrounding communities of the university.
- (iii) To give impetus to coordinated institutional efforts to redress, and build a society envisioned by the post-apartheid stakeholders; and
- (iv) To promote and to affirm our unwavering commitment towards building a culture of courage and solidarity in doing transformational work within the Division Student Affairs. This culture celebrates differences, challenges, prejudices and ensures fairness.

At DSAf, we aspire 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.

Our pledge is 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

Leadership

The development of this Charter should serve as a reference point for leadership at SU. Our staff and student leaders should therefore be held accountable along the following lines:

Individuals who are in leadership positions should be representative of the demographics of the Republic of South Africa. Diversity of representation in leadership should go beyond traditional identities to include marginalised people, such as people with disabilities etc., should reflect the demographics of the Republic of South Africa.

We should ensure the continuity of leadership skills and thinking even as students and staff join and leave SU.

Staff

We believe that it is important to create an atmosphere where no person is bullied (mentally, emotionally, physically or online). Our place of employment should be one where individual's strengths and talents are adequately harnessed.

We undertake to eradicate unfair discrimination, and harassment, as well as to create an environment free of discrimination for staff to thrive and excel.

Students

We affirm our intentionality towards co-creating spaces that are free of discrimination and harassment, where students and staff are enabled to flourish and explore their potential. We aim to eradicate stigmatisation regarding mental and physical health status.

We commit to celebrating both individuality and being a Stellenbosch University community member. We therefore discourage assimilation (which drowns diversity) and being forced to be a part of a more dominant culture in appearance, background, financial status, language, accommodation (residence or commuter student), academic status and any other difference that divides rather than unite students and staff.

Campus culture (most particularly the social aspect of campus life, including the First-Year Welcoming culture) and student leadership structures, should be more inclusive, accommodating the diverse student community. This can be achieved by ensuring that all voices are heard in different spaces when deciding on activities to either welcome new students or all other social activities held in different residences, and also including commuter students.

We commit to support more transformative leadership development and a training process that ensures that all material used for student leaders' programmes exposes them to an experience and knowledge different from what they are acquainted to, or maybe most comfortable with, to a completely new experience. This may for example include training and awareness programmes focused on anti - gender-based violence, anti-cyberbullying, and anti-discrimination and harassment of all forms (including mental health).

Research

DSAf staff have the opportunity to engage in research as it forms their basis of evidence-based initiatives and programmes.

Staff must understand the way in which both the role of researchers and research participants have been constructed historically and are consequently perpetuated within the context of SU.

Historically, SU has been complicit in various practices that are not reflective of “good research practice”. We acknowledge these injustices of the past and aim to be more reflexive and ethical in our research practices.

Ethical considerations with research participants remain paramount and internal ethics boards must therefore be consulted.

Community

We believe that it is important to remember that as a university community, we are also members of society.

Universities are seen as potential ideological expressions of societies and if we manage to bring change in this space, a domino effect will follow into the rest of the country, and we will in turn be creating a future we can all be proud to have shaped. We are change agents and we should actively engage in activities, conversations and decisions that will bring this into realisation by acknowledge our different realities, finding common ground and forging together to create a better community for ourselves and those coming after us.

The SU Community is broadly defined as the communities from which we as students and staff hail. It includes leadership, students, staff, interns, contract workers, patients, clients in Division Student Affairs and the associates of DSAf.

Co-Curriculum and Training

We aim to promote a curriculum, co-curriculum and training that promotes equity, inclusivity, and fairness; and which is conducive to the promotion and development of successful students and graduates.

A more inclusive curriculum and co-curriculum shall be achieved through the incorporation of social justice topics such as gender, disability, and decolonization.

This will allow for the creation of a more inclusive system of learning for all regardless of socio-economic status. Furthermore, standard virtual and

technological platforms of learning and teaching are required, to ensure the promotion of equal access to students and fairness for all.

Natural Environment

We will focus on sustainable development and investment - referring specifically to a policy of divestment at SU where certain industries are supported that contribute to ecocide nationally and internationally.

We endeavour to create a naturally sustainable environment through food sustainability, reducing our carbon footprint in any way possible, and conducting ourselves in a way that will not be harmful to the planet.

Our actions will be geared toward ensuring an environment that is clean and healthy for future generations at SU. We should therefore be intentional in the way we work, live and study at all of our campuses.

Our pledge

We pledge to uphold the commitments made in this Charter in a manner that recognises the dignity and respects all of our stakeholders. We acknowledge that this charter is aspirational and that as members of the Division: Student Affairs, we are responsible for the realisation of this pledge.