

REFLECTIONS ON THE CAMPUS / RES. LIFE AND CULTURE REVIEW

Dr. Choice Makhetha – Senior Director Student Affairs



"Many recommendations have been made and almost all of these recommendations are reasonable and necessary to implement."

It is very exciting to look back at the amount of work that has been done by colleagues and students, volunteering their time, energy, thoughts and ideas, in order to contribute to the improvement of our work in the Division Student Affairs. I want to thank every person involved because we generated a lot of improvement and transformation work to be implemented in 2022!

At the beginning of 2021, after realizing how many areas needed extra attention, I decided that we would have the Campus / Res Life and Culture Review, to look deeper into several areas of work, in order to address issues raised properly. There was excitement and skepticism as well in the air, fear and doubt also, that there might be some other agendas at play, than just improving our work.

I remember smiling to myself with great understanding and at this point, I knew that I had to motivate colleagues to be part of this process. I needed to bring excitement and give assurance that this process was in no way going to assess performance of colleagues, but full focus on our work together as DSAf team. I had to also remove fear and panic that were brought by the word “review”, by emphasizing that we as DSAf team, would be reviewing our own work, to understand where the gaps are and to improve our services, with the support and involvement of students. Once it was clear to all that there were no hidden agendas, excitement came back. I also became very enthusiastic about the work ahead of us and the taskteams took shape. Thank you to colleagues who accepted my request for them to serve as Chairpersons, they did a great job leading the teamwork.

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The last hurdle was to remove a negative reaction towards the word “taskteam”. I listened to different inputs why not to call these teams – taskteams, influenced by disappointments from the past. As I like the name “taskteam”, I did not want us to shy away from the name. I promised everyone involved that together we were going to rescue the name “taskteam” from the wrong impressions and experiences which did not deliver as expected. I promised that the DSAf taskteams would bring results and share feedback with everyone involved. That once recommendations are finalized in reports, these would be considered and implementation monitored, continuously providing feedback to the DSAf team and students.

I am excited to share with you that, the 13 taskteams that we had, led by colleagues who volunteered their time and skills, completed their work and submitted reports. Many recommendations have been made and almost all of these recommendations are reasonable and necessary to implement. A list of the recommendations will be made available soon (December Newsletter of DSAf), with an update of what has already been done. Please note that a huge part of the work will be done through 2022 and some projects overlapping into 2023.

I want to thank the Student Assistant in my Office, Ms. Kofi-Anan Mkumla, for the passion and commitment shown to see this project through, regularly checking-in with the Chairpersons to provide support and to make input to discussions. My Personal Assistant, Mrs. Audrey Poole, made sure that all systems are in place and also empowered Kofi-Anan to succeed in her work, within our office. The three of us supported one another in order to support that Chairpersons fully. Every moment of the six-month period was brilliant!



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The taskteams and Chairpersons were as follows:

1. Commuter Students – Mrs. Benita van Zyl
2. Constitutions, Rules and Disciplinary Code – Mr. Greef Jaco Brink / Qaqamba Mdaka
3. DSAf Staff Recognition and Wellness – Dr. Elmien Sinclair
4. First-Generation Students – Mrs. Joy Petersen
5. Leadership Training and Development – Dr. Johan Groenewald
6. LLL Programme - Mr. Noël Bekkers
7. LGBTQI+ Community – Mr. Fanele Ndebele
8. Programming in Residences – Ruth Andrews
9. Residence Head Appointment and Training – Mrs. Riana Engelbrecht
10. Safety and Security – Mr. Brandon Como
11. Student Governance and Elections – Mr. Anele Mdepa
12. University Access / Disability matters – Dr. Marcia Lyner-Cloephas
13. Welcoming Programme Content and Design – Ms. Ayanda Ntuli

Only one taskteam will continue work into 2022 and a report will be submitted at the end of March 2022, as it was only constituted at the end of September 2021. That is, the Welcoming Programme Content and Design taskteam. We hope to improve our work in this area as well and to ensure that the whole of DSAf is involved, going forward.

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The one-on-one monthly meetings I had with each Chairperson added value to the process. Each Chairperson had the freedom to approach the work from their strength and preferred design. Each Chairperson had the freedom to bring their leadership styles into the way the taskteam worked and this gave all Chairpersons a chance to explore several ways until they found their unique approach and strength. The same went for the Reports to be submitted. No particular template was provided because I wanted each Chairperson and taskteam to decide on the design and content, based on the outcomes we wanted to achieve. A flexible approach delivered huge results for this Review and we are grateful for the leadership provided by colleagues.

Work already underway to address some of the recommendations made is as follows:

- Review of the criteria for appointment of Residence Heads and training required;
- LLL Programme - Infrastructure development (several houses decommissioned) for renovation in 2022;
- Assessment of physical spaces to ensure accessibility for students and colleagues with disabilities. Increased use of braille in documents for inclusion and involvement of students with disabilities in student life, also creating employment opportunities;
- Review / rewrite of the Residence Rules in 2022 to ensure alignment with the values of the university and relevance to the generation of current and prospective students. Current Residence Rules to be applicable only until the new document, broadly consulted on, is finalized and approved by the DVC Learning and Teaching and has served as Rectorate as well, hopefully by June 2022;



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- Residence Constitutions to also align to SU values; recognition of SU Statute, authority of the university leadership and administrative responsibility of DSAf and CSC, still with space to define themselves, their uniqueness and values;
- Constituting the DSAf Leadership Development and Training Forum by end of 2021;
- Commuter Students / PSO environment refinement to be integrated and inclusive of all commuting students. Great progress made by colleagues in the PSO environment. Building project of the Victoria Hub approved and construction arrangements underway for 2022 and completion hopefully 2023; and
- Clarification of a definition of “First-Generation Students” throughout the university system and on Application forms, in order to attract / reach the right students. More work being done in this area underway.

A lot of work is ahead of us in 2022 and that is exciting!

Thank you to everyone who made a contribution to the Campus / Res Life and Culture Review. Thank you to the DSAf Transformation Forum for keeping a close eye on the Review and requested updates at different stages. It is a huge contribution and commitment to transform the environment within which we work and serve. We will continue to focus on creating a transformative student experience. Every student counts!

Thank you.