



SRC 2020/2021 Term I Report

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Constitutional Responsibilities

Student Constitution

As per s88(1), the duties of the Societies Council is to represent the interests of all recognised student societies and that of student societies of the university of Stellenbosch, in that capacity on the SRC and all other structures.

Societies Council

As per s15(1)(2), the chairperson of the Societies Council is responsible for representing the interests of all societies and the Societies Council on the SRC.





Portfolio Overview

Students' Representative Council

The Societies Council is mandated to be the representative body of all student societies. The Societies Council contributes to the general student experience through supporting student societies and encouraging students to participate in activities which will enhance the student experience.

Stellenbosch University

The Societies Council has a dual mandate, the first being that of representing student societies on campus, the second being that the Societies Council serves as a forum of student leaders that attempt to protect and further the interests of all students. This in turn ensures that student societies become an enriching platform for all students.

South Africa

Student organisations have always been a pillar of south African higher institution of learning. From our pre-democratic era, student organisations were the main driving force in the struggle against the injustices of the time, it is from within student organisations that formidable leaders such as Solomon Mahlangu were born. In that regard even in post democracy South Africa student organisation continue to be forces of positive change, whether one agrees with their tactics or not, the role and influence of student societies in the change we have witnessed in the higher education sphere can never be down played.

Term Overview

Chairperson's Report

BACKGROUND

My election occurred on the 27th of July 2020, with the results being released on the 30th of July 2020 due to the unprecedented times covid19 has thrust us into. After my election, I underwent the handover process that entailed me being a shadow to the previous Chairperson.

The handover processed entailed having all matters that the then incumbent Chairperson still had to deal with. Additionally, the handover process served as a period whereby I was introduced to the relevant structures and individuals who would be crucial to me succeeding in my term as the Chairperson.





PROJECTS

My official term after the handover process started on the 14th of September 2020. Below is an assessment of the projects supervised during my first term in office.

SOCIETIES LEVIES

The issue of societies' levies is one that I inherited from my predecessor. Following covid19 and the subsequent lockdown, the Institutional Committee for Business Continuity (ICBC) decided that all societies' fees would be returned to all students as a form of financial relief. This decision was taken without consulting societies or the Societies Council Executive Committee.

My predecessor wrote a letter in conjunction with the then incumbent chairperson of the Tygerberg Societies Council. The letter was a request to have the fees reversed to the societies as the initial reversal had left societies financially inviable.

Societies were requested to provide reasoning for keeping their society fee the same or adjusting it slightly. This was facilitated and the societies received a portion of their initial fee or the full initial fee. Whilst this was amazing for societies, all hell broke loose because students had received contradictory information.

This resulted in a swarm of emails from disgruntled parents and students requesting for the fees to be refunded as the societies were not utilised during the lockdown period. After fielding several of the emails without an official letter, one was drafted and then sent out as the standard communication to parents and students as a response to their queries.

MATIES LATIN BALLROOM DANCE SOCIETY (MLBDS)

A good portion of the queries received was concerning the MLBDS, what made the queries even more difficult to deal with was the contradictory statements that the current MLBDS executive committee and their predecessors written in the information forwarded to the ICBC.

This caused unwanted confusion amongst students who received communication both for the Societies Council and MLBDS. A meeting was set up with the chairperson of MLBDS, Student Governance, and me. This meeting was aimed at figuring out where the miscommunication occurred and how to resolve the issue.

The matter was resolved and MLBDS refunded all their members fees as they had initially wanted to do.

PULP SOCIETY

Pulp society is one that faces a unique challenge, having to spend about 80% of its income generated to pay for Pulp Cinema. They also experience a similar problem to MLBDS of miscommunication, however, they have yet to produce a viable way forward.

A meeting was set up between the Pulp Society chairperson, Student Governance, and me. This meeting similarly to that of MLBDS was to figure out where the miscommunication had occurred and how they wanted to have the issue resolved.





Pulp society has since sent out an email to their constituencies informing them as to why they are only able to refund only a portion of the fee and not the full amount. They have yet to provide direction on how they would like the Executive Committee to assist in the facilitation of the entire refund procedure.

EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS

On the same day as my election, three (3) of the five (5) Executive Committee members were already elected as per s13(6) of the Societies Council Constitution, of which the following were appointed as a result:

- Sinegugu April – Vice-Chairperson
- Tamara Wicomb – Administrative Officer
- Monwabisi Petersen – Secretary

Five days after my election and the election of some of the Executive Committee members, s12(2) came into play in an attempt to fill the remaining Executive Committee positions. At the end of this process, the following were appointed as members of the Executive Committee:

- Tebogo Mphahlele – Registrar
- Manqoba Mdau – Financial Advisor

At the start of the new Societies Council term, all members of the Executive Committee were appointed and ready to get to work.

CODE OF CONDUCT

As per s14(1)(12) of the Societies Council Constitution, the Code of Conduct needs to be adopted by the Council at the beginning of the Executive Committee term. The Code of Conduct is aimed at ensuring that discipline amongst the Council is maintained, in addition to this, the Code of Conduct also outlines important procedures constituted for by the Societies Council Constitution.

Following s15(1)(3) of the Societies Council Constitution, as the Chairperson, I am mandated to ensure that the Code of Conduct is adopted. The adoption of the Code of Conduct has been one that is made for nightmares.

During voting for the adoption, we somehow managed to reach quorum, however, of the members who constitution quorum only six of the votes were valid. This made adopting the Code of Conduct improbable and another round of voting was to be held. The Code of Conduct has yet to be adopted, however, this is hopefully an issue that will be resolved before the commencement of the following term.

CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

After spending an insane amount of time perusing the Societies Council Constitution, I am of the strong belief that while the constitution is quite sound, it is at best incoherent. With this information at hand, I informed the Vice-Chairperson of the need to have the constitution re-written, as so to ensure better flow and making the whole document more coherent, and further minimalizing loopholes and discrepancies.





The Vice-Chairperson oversees this review as mandated by s16(1)(9) of the Societies Council Constitution to be the internal policymaker for the Council.

STUDENT PARLIAMENT

S57 of the Student Constitution significantly impacts the Societies Council as it mandates that 19 members of the Societies Council. The members were appointed before the 5th of September 2020 to ensure that the Societies Council had a full delegate to send to Student Parliament when the new Speaker was appointed. The 19 members consisted of the following:

- Eight (8) members of the Societies Council.
- Ten (10) members of society committees.
- The Chairperson, as a member of the SRC.

YEAR PLAN

On the 15th of September 2020, the Executive Committee had their first meeting, it was during this very lengthy meeting, filled with food and laughter, that the yearly plan was drawn up. The year plan included all plausible trainings that the Executive Committee might want to host, as well as events that ensure that s14(1)(6) was fulfilled.

The year plan was drafted and agreed upon by the Executive Committee based on the knowledge that University would resume as normal the following year. Once it became clear to the Executive Committee that this is not likely to happen, there was a motion to change some of the event dates to ensure that all the projected events still occurred.

The amendment of the year plan will occur after the November examination period, this will enable all members of the Executive Committee to take part in the amending of the plans.

BUDGET

The budget of the Societies Council was submitted to the SRC on the 10th of October 2020, the budget submitted requested a subsidiary from the SRC amounting to R170 000. However, the amount that was granted by the SRC executive committee was R56 986,89.

This means that the Council only received 33,52% of the funds that were requested, the amount we were allocated does not even make predicate. The amount that was allocated to the Council, has put the Council in a delicate position whereby, there is a need to find other avenues of funding to ensure that the Council stays afloat and is still able to meet all the obligations outlined in the constitution.

FINANCIAL POLICY

Following the immense reduction of the budget, the Executive Committee had no other choice but to ensure that s37 of the Societies Council Constitution comes to fruition. The drafting of this policy was mandated to the Financial Advisor and the Secretary.

The policy has yet to be provided to the Executive Committee for revision. It will be provided by the end of the November examination period.





'HOW TO SOCIETY' WORKSHOP

As per s14(1)(8), the Executive Committee is mandated by the constitution to ensure that there is sufficient leadership development for Council members. With this mandate in mind, the Executive Committee created a leadership workshop to equip newly elected leaders with the tools necessary for how to function optimally as a society.

The Registrar was tasked with planning this workshop, alongside the Administrative Officer.

CHAIRPERSON'S GUIDELINES

During the 'How to society' workshop, there was mention of there being chairperson's guidelines being drawn up. These guidelines were aimed at providing new leadership with nuggets of information I wish I had had before joining the cult known as student leadership.

The main points of the guidelines were as follows:

1. Be prepared for anything.
2. Know the constitution.
3. Delegation is the key to success.
4. Mental health.
5. Co-curricular recognition.
6. Leadership style.
7. Inclusivity.
8. Vision and mission.

The guidelines have been submitted to the Vice-Chairperson and the rest of the Executive Committee for proofreading, perusal, and commenting. Once these are received back, they will be distributed to the Council.

REMARKS

The conclusion of my first term was more of a rollercoaster than I had imagined, especially when it came to juggling being diplomatic with parents and students. Throughout this term these are some of the things I have noted:

1. There is disjointed communication between the previous executive committees of societies and the incoming executive committees. This results in a lot of false communication that left a lot of the parties confused.
2. The Societies Council Executive Committee lacks the diversity that is represented within the Societies Council.
3. Policy documents of the Societies Council often lack coherence and are often disjointed making the documents more difficult to read comprehensively.
4. The Societies Council is way too financially dependent on the SRC, making it difficult to plan events the way the Executive Committee would like.
5. There is a need for reiteration of information for incoming leadership because there always seems to be a disconnect between new leadership and old leadership.





Plans for next term

In the following term, I am aiming for the following:

1. Ensuring that sufficient leadership training for the Societies Council takes place.
2. Ensuring that the welcoming fair and the general fair takes place.
3. Ensuring that the co-curricular programme has a smooth beginning.
4. Ensuring that all signups are verified and processed.

Recommendations to improve portfolio

1. The Societies Council Executive Committee needs to ensure that important documentation and information is passed on to the incoming executive committee.
2. The current Societies Council Executive Committee should find ways to improve the diversity within the Executive Committee.
3. Policy documents should be revised at least every two years to ensure that they are still relevant to the structure as well as to ensure that they are comprehensive throughout.
4. S37 of the Societies Council Constitution needs to take effect to ensure that the Societies Council stops being dependent on the SRC.
5. A standard first training that introduces new Council members to the basics of 'how to society' to ensure that all leaders receive the same starter pack to leadership.

Important Contacts

A list of all important contacts will be included in my final report as well as my handover folder.

