



# SRC 2020/2021 Term I Report

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## Constitutional Responsibilities

Currently the Student Financial Access portfolio is not a compulsory portfolio per the constitution.

Please find below an extract of the SU (Stellenbosch University) Student Constitution. I deem the below extract the most important section.

*“The SRC is the highest representative and policy-making student body at the University and is under the authority of the University Council.*

*(1) SRC members must comply with the provisions of this Constitution and policy and regulation of the SRC.  
(2) If an SRC member contravenes subsection (1), or if reasonable grounds exist to believe that a member will contravene subsection (1), then – (a) the Student Court may grant an appropriate order at the request of any student, and if that order is not complied with, the member concerned can be discharged from office in terms section 25 (1)(h); and (b) the Evaluation Panel can take this into account in its decision whether or not to decrease the honorarium of the member in terms of section 47.”*

It is particularly important to familiarise yourself with the content of the SU Student Constitution, found [here](#).

## Portfolio Overview

Please see a portfolio overview per the SRC website [here](#).

When challenging socio-economic conditions prevail in South Africa, especially as they are exacerbated by COVID-19, the Student Financial Access portfolio's vision is that no student will be financially excluded. The portfolio focuses on collaborative efforts to ensure students who are





able, willing & deserving of a place at Stellenbosch University can secure it, despite their financial circumstances. This involves dealing with matters such as bursaries, loans, application fees, tuition fees, student debt, and other monetary challenges.

The creation of this portfolio was advocated for by the Chair of the Student Representative Council due to the high volume of student finance queries. The most responsible measure to ensure that these queries were attended to was to appoint a dedicated individual to the Student Financial Access portfolio.

Please note that due to the lack of resources the Student Financial Access portfolio can only refer students to the relevant departments.

Prior to 2020 the Student Representative Council has not had a Student Financial Access portfolio the SRC has however had a Student Access and Student Success Portfolio. I struggled a lot to get these reports so [here](#) is the link for all the reports of previous years so that you can get the bigger picture of this portfolio.

It is no secret that the demographics of Stellenbosch University are changing. Over the past few years and for many more years to come, many students who are in the lower socio-economic bracket are being admitted. Many of these students do not have the means to pay for their own tertiary education. These students will make use of funding from NSFAS (National Students Financial Aid Scheme), SU and private institutions to complete their studies.

Most of the time students will not have problems with regards to their funding. Their fees will be paid in time, they will receive their allowances monthly and when they graduate, they will receive their academic transcript like all the other students.

Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world. More often than I would like to admit students' fees are not paid in time which leads to them not being able to see their exam marks. Sometimes a students' funder decides to defund them in the middle of the year. Due to a technological or human error some students go for months without receiving a food allowance. Students with the abovementioned issues usually approach the Undergraduate Department for Bursaries and Loans or the Postgraduate Office for help.

Bear in mind that the number of students that need help usually exceed the human capital of these departments. This means that some students' queries go unanswered for months. That is where the Student Financial Access portfolio comes in.

This portfolio then follows up on all these unanswered queries to ensure that students get the answers that they so desperately need. This portfolio is thus a body that keeps the SU Bursaries and Loans department accountable.

If you are still a bit confused this portfolio helps students with any matter that is related to finances.

## Committees / Task Teams

Currently this portfolio has no committee. I am however planning to get an individual to help me with social media. Due to the sensitivity of information that is being dealt with I would highly advise against





having a huge committee, one or two individuals to help you with all the admin. I however prefer to do everything on my own.

#### University Committees:

- Committee for Bursaries and Loans
- Student Debt Working Group
- DSAf Transformation Sub-committee

#### Task Teams:

- RegisterAll Tygerberg
- RegisterAll Main Campus

## Term Overview

This term was all about getting the portfolio up and running. I will not lie and say it was easy. There were many times where I felt lost since there has never been such a portfolio. This term was a period of trial-and-error.

I then got into contact with the Chairperson of the SRC to express my frustration. The Chair then proceeded to explain to me that this portfolio was specifically created to deal with any financial issues that students have. Another component of this portfolio is to raise funds for students who are in need.

The first order of business was to ensure that all students are aware of this portfolio. I did this by marketing my portfolio. I sent out posters to @sujustkidding and to all the various SRC members to circulate to their student communities. The response was overwhelming, and I sometimes struggled to keep up and follow up on all the queries.

To ensure that I did not miss queries I implemented a system where students that email me must fill in a Microsoft form. This enabled me to translate the information to an excel spreadsheet and it became much easier to keep track of all the queries.

The form can be viewed [here](#).

Due to the high volume of complaints, I received from students with regards to the lack of communication from the Bursaries and Loans department I proceeded to compile a list of grievances which I presented to the Deputy Director and Head of the Centre for Undergraduate Bursaries and Loans. A meeting was then held to address these grievances and a way forward was discussed.

I would like to stress the importance of having a good relationship with the staff members of Stellenbosch University as they are the only people that can help you to help the students.

One of the biggest issues I faced during my first term was the delay in processing food security applications from the social workers' office. Many students communicated to SRC members that they waited more than a week to hear the outcome of their application. The SRC then brought up this issue with the social workers office. In the end a meeting was held so that the delays and process of food security assistance could be explained. The delay in relaying application outcomes was mostly due to the high volume of students that applied. In this meeting it was decided that the only role the SRC would play in food security was to relay information to students.





The other issues were students not being able to see their marks due to outstanding fees. This was a big problem as students did not know how much they needed to pass the year. Unfortunately, I was not able to solve this problem for several reasons. The first reason is that the blocking of marks is an institutional decision that falls under the Registrars' Division. I did approach the various stakeholders to address this issue. It comes down to certainty that a student fees will eventually be paid. If there is no such certainty it becomes virtually impossible to lift a block on a student's marks. I also realised that marks were blocked for auditing reasons as well.

As much as it is impossible to influence this decision, I still think that the SRC should always advocate that students with outstanding fees should be able to see their marks.

The latter part of my first term was planning the Stationary Aid Project. The goal of this project is to assist students with vouchers to buy degree related stationary. I have decided to work with the Wimbledon Cluster on this project. The next phase of this project is to determine the stationary supplier that we will be working with. I will provide further information regarding this project in my next term report.

I also spent the last part of my term planning the RegisterAll campaign. The Student Financial Access portfolio will work closely with the Treasurer of the SRC to make sure the process runs smoothly.

This campaign aims to help students who are financially needy, register. The SRC will not pay the whole registration fee but help students to split their fee into 3 instalments and pay the first instalment.

During this term it is particularly important that you get the SRC Executive to have a meeting which you will be invited to, to pitch your RegisterAll Campaign and have them allocate a budget so that you can start calculating and projecting how many students that you will be able to assist.

Please keep in mind that Registration of the Tygerberg campus starts in January so you will most probably have to work in the holidays so that you can assist Tygerberg students as well. A detailed report on the RegisterAll Campaign will be available in my second term report.

## Plans for next term.

Term two will commence at the beginning of the 2021 academic calendar. The aim of this term is to ensure that the RegisterAll campaign runs smoothly.

Ensuring that the Stationary Aid Project is implemented and completed successfully.

I am also planning to collaborate with the bursaries and loans department to have compulsory training for all first year NSFAS (National Students Financial Aid Scheme) students. The aim of this training is to ensure that students have the necessary skills to be able to manage their NSFAS allowances.

## Recommendations to improve portfolio.

I would recommend the following for the Student Financial Access Portfolio:

- I would advise that this portfolio holder attempts to sit on the Student Fees Committee.
- Many students are still not aware of this portfolio so marketing this portfolio is of the utmost of importance.





- Currently this portfolio can only refer students to the relevant departments, and it comes with the disadvantage that students cannot always be assisted by the relevant departments. Since most of the issues that cannot be resolved are financial in nature, the only way to be able to assist the students who get excluded by the system is to improve the financial resources of this portfolio. The above can be done by crowdfunding or properly motivating an increase in the portfolio budget to the SRC Executive.

### Tips for my successor

- You are going to make many mistakes and that is fine, if you are open to growth and acknowledging when you are wrong.
- Please ensure that you set healthy boundaries between “personal and professional.”
- Please give yourself “me time,” this portfolio is very taxing both mentally and administratively as you are dealing with issues that are affecting students' futures. Do remember to take a break.
- I would highly advise that you set up a system that works for you with regards to dealing with queries.

### Important Contacts

Issue	Name	Email
Food Security	Lizzie Witbooi	lgwitbooi@sun.ac.za
Serious undergraduate bursaries matters'	Arrie Hanekom	ahan@sun.ac.za
NSFAS matters	Kallie Sauls	kallies@sun.ac.za
NSFAS matters	Lynette Williams	lrw@sun.ac.za
Postgraduate funding serious matters	Nugent Lewis	nugent@sun.ac.za
SU Bursaries matters - undergraduates	Tulia George	tulia@sun.ac.za
SU Bursaries matters – postgraduate	Tammy Abrahams	tammya@sun.ac.za
Student Fees	Anri Engelbrecht	anriengel@sun.ac.za
Registration	Ashmind Daniels	bvdm2@sun.ac.za

