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Contents

[Constitutional Responsibilities 3](#_Toc36513513)

[Portfolio Overview 3](#_Toc36513514)

[Committees / Task Teams 3](#_Toc36513515)

[Budget Overview 4](#_Toc36513516)

[Term Overview 4](#_Toc36513517)

[Plans for Next Academic Term 10](#_Toc36513518)

[Important Contacts*.* 11](#_Toc36513519)

# Constitutional Responsibilities

As Chapter 6 Section 77 of the Student Constitution states, the Academic Affairs Council (AAC) is responsible for promoting the rights of students in Chapter 2, but more specifically in Section 8(2) for quality education, academic support and transparent and justifiable assessment procedures. Thus, the curriculum and co-curriculum activities and their intersection falls under the support structure of the (AAC).

# Portfolio Overview

The AAC Chairperson is an Ex-Officio Member on the SRC. Which focuses on ensuring academic success and excellence as the main driver, as well as coordinating the interaction between the SRC and the faculties. Its three responsibility areas are Academics, Co-Curricular Activities and Research.

For Stellenbosch University (SU), this leads to the AAC being the main body where Faculty Committees (Student Representation at a Faculty Level) are able to coordinate activities and create a cooperative system that allows for faculties to interact, and through the AAC to be represented at an Institutional level.

Within the South African context, the AAC is a body that can actively promote the improvement of higher education systems throughout the country through academic, co-curricular and research.

# Committees / Task Teams

**SRC Executive Committee**

**Senate**: The highest decision-making body of the University for Academic and Research decisions. It is thus vital for the AAC to be present.

**Academic Planning Committee**: It is responsible for final decisions revolving around academic planning for the University. It reports directly to Senate. This committee focuses on topics such as new research centres, programme changes and so forth.

**Co-Curriculum Committee**: It is the committee responsible for accrediting co-curricular activities at the University.

**Institutional Business Continuity Subcommittee for Online Learning & Assessment**: This subcommittee is responsible for the swift transition from contact classes to online learning, ensuring that the process is successful and that the transition is beneficial for all those affected.

# Budget Overview

No budget has been allocated yet.

# Term Overview

This is inclusive of tasks and initiatives from October 2019 till March 2020.

1. **Help Desk Initiative**

This is the first initiative that the council initiated in its term in October 2019. The Help Desk is a resource intended initiative by the AAC with the aim of providing students with a platform to offer information and support related to topics regarding HEMIS, Dean's Concession Exams and Readmission *(these were the main things addressed considering that time of the year)* and any academic related concerns. The main reason the council suggested this initiative, was based on the assumption that information particularly relating to HEMIS, Dean's Concession Exams and Readmission did not reach students timeously. So, in order to remedy such a situation, the council came up with this idea in an effort of ensuring that the information explicitly reached the students.

The Help Desk was held on 24 October 2019 on the Rooiplein while there were also setups at the Engineering and Theology faculties (due to location). The council members as well as their faculty committee members were present throughout the day, answering all queries brought forth by students. The initiative was a success and allowed the AAC to continue sharing the information with students via its social media platforms.

1. **Readmission Appeals**

The overall readmission appeals process was smooth, seldomly there being issues which mostly resulted from miscommunication which were resolved. As the Chairperson of the AAC I availed myself via email as well as for face-to-face interactions with students who needed assistance regarding the appeals process since December 2019 till the last deadline which was on 6 January 2020.

In line with what my predecessor mentioned in his final term report: *“The Registrar and Institutional Readmission Appeals Committee (I-RAC) Chair have agreed to the need for students on the readmission appeals committees”.*  I decided to do a follow-up which led to a meeting with Dr Ronel Retief (Registrar), Mr Ashmind Daniels (Deputy Registrar), Prof Louise Warnich (former I-RAC Chair) & Prof Reggie Nel (current I-RAC Chair) discussing the feasibility of having student representation on the various faculty readmission appeals committees (RACs). Simplified, the outcome of the meeting was: the committees will consider first a pilot project of student representation, with each committee having one student representative whom was to be a postgraduate student. Considering the limited time, only three faculties (Science, Agri Science & Theology) were able to accommodate the pilot project of having student representation on their RACs.

Three students were identified to serve on the committees, all being postgraduate students serving on the student faculty committees as Postgraduate Representatives. Led by Prof Warnich, training for the students was held before they commenced with their duties. At the training, there was representation from the Centre for Counselling and Student Development and the Registrar’s office with the Registrar present as well.

What is important to note is that even though the students were present at the above-mentioned committees, theirs was to simply observe as this was a pilot project. It is also worth mentioning that all three of the student representatives signed a Non-Disclosure agreement which none violated.

The students each compiled a report on student representation on the RACs *(the reports will be made available to the student populous in due time)*. These reports have been shared with the Registrar and I-RAC Chairperson. What is to follow is discussions on how student representation on RACs will be formalised, those discussions are currently underway. However, the overall impression from the student representatives was that it is essential that all RACs have student representatives.

1. **Registration Campaign Workshop**

The Registration Campaign Workshop was set up to ensure the following:

* To understand registration processes.
* To expose staff and student leaders on the ecosystem of support that is available to channel enquiries, concerns and grievances.
* To form a working relationship between the support staff in the faculties, Student Access, Student Affairs, Registrar’s Division, International Office, Postgraduate Office and the student leaders.

All relevant stakeholders (student and staff members) were invited to partake in this initiative. All crucial divisions such as and not limited to Academic Counselling and Support; Finance, Bursaries and Loans; Accommodation and the SRC – explained what role they play during the registration period, how this was going to look like in 2020 and what kind of support they required from all those involved in the registration period. The workshop was a great success, with many who attended finding it useful and necessary.

My main involvement in the workshop was highlighting the SRC’s ecosystem of support – covering mainly what was to be available as well as the programme of action from the SRC’s side.

1. **Leadership Training and Development**

In order to ensure that the AAC executes its duties effectively and to the satisfaction of the student populous it is of paramount importance that the council members are equipped with the necessary skills and leadership proficiency. As a result, a weekend of learning, equipping and connecting was organised for the AAC members early in February 2020. The topics covered were those such as our Vision and Mission, Higher Education Context in SA, Constitutional Literacy, Creating Co-Curriculum Programmes, Financial Management, Substance Abuse and Team Building amongst many.

The outcome of this training and development focused weekend resulted in the effective work that the council has carried out thus far in its term. Guided by our values:

* Transparency
* Accountability
* Integrity
* Compassion
* Discernment

the AAC continues to show that it prides itself in representing the academic interest of all students at Stellenbosch University through a collaborative effort and this has filtered down to the various faculty committees which the council members lead.

1. **Council Rebranding**

The council recognised the need of using the English version of the Academic Affairs Council acronym “AAC” more and in conjunction with the Afrikaans acronym “ABR” (meaning *Akademiese Belangraad*). This decision was informed by the fact that majority of students did not recognise the council simply because they did not understand from its name what it was and what it represents, as a result of a language barrier.

1. **Class Representatives’ Training**

In the past, the AAC held a training session which all class representatives from all faculties attended. Upon discussing the effectiveness of such an approach with relevant stakeholders; the best option was from this year onwards each faculty hosts their own class representative training at which the Chairperson or Vice Chairperson of the AAC will make a presentation. The main communication which had to be conveyed from the AAC to the class representatives was mainly the purpose of a class representative, what the link between class representatives and the AAC is and lastly what the grievance procedure relating to academic issues was and how that process looks like. All trainings were a success, with day-to-day administration of the class representatives being managed by the relevant people in the various faculty committees.

1. **Academic Guardian Project**

The AAC initiated this project because it realised that institutional academic related information does not reach students timeously. In order to remedy this, all residences and PSOs on the Stellenbosch campus received an Academic Guardian (an AAC member) to ensure that any important reaches students easily and on time. The project is simply the AAC offering support to the student populous. It is important to note that upon consultation with the relevant Tygerberg student leaders, a similar project is already underway which meant there was no need of allocating guardians to the Tygerberg campus. The AAC Chairperson is the guardian to the Military Campus.

Through the project the AAC hopes to offer advice regarding academic issues, share institutional information that is academic-related and promote relations between students and the AAC.

1. **AAC Day**

Often the general student populous commented that the presence of the AAC was not felt, particularly visual presence. The AAC dedicated a day (28 February 2020) whereby it engaged with students on the Rooiplein on a variety of things such as academic related queries and just general chats while having a fun time. There was a lot of AAC merchandise which was given away to students while in return them following the AAC on its social media platforms. The day ended with a flash mob which was not only done by the AAC members but also members of the various faculty committees. The students enjoyed the engagement, highlighting their appreciation of the AAC showing its ‘fun’ side and allowing its members to meet and engage with students beyond academics.

1. **Covid-19 response**

Amidst the uncertainty brought about by the Covid-19 outbreak, the main focus then became the transition towards online learning. Cognisant of the many concerns arising about the transition mainly concerning access; it is important that students understand that the AAC is doing all it can to ensure that no student is left out when the transition comes to fruition. The AAC Chairperson serves on the Institutional Business Continuity Subcommittee for Online Learning & Assessment – championing all the concerns that students have raised thus far.

# Plans for Next Academic Term

Amidst the Covid-19 outbreak, what is of great importance now is addressing the sudden change within the student academic life context. It is of paramount importance that the transition is not exclusive in anyway and ensuring that, will require the AAC’s full focus on the issue. As a result, all the initiatives planned by the AAC have been put on hold with support for students during this trying time at its forefront.

# Important Contacts*.*

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