



Stellenbosch

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SRC

Students' Representative Council
Ibhunga elimele abafundi
Studenteraad



SRC TERM 2 REPORT

SRC SECRETARY-GENERAL | STUDENT FINANCIAL ACCESS



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Phiwokuhle Qabaka – SRC Secretary General | Student Financial Access – qabakap@sun.ac.za



Foreword

Revolutionary greetings Maties,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all of you that believed in me and took the time to vote for me. I would have not received the opportunity to represent our student community and be the voice for the voiceless if it was not for you and for that I will forever remain grateful.

I ran for the Students Representative Council because I felt that our institution needed a different kind of leadership that I believed I offered. The biggest reason of all is my love for students and there is nothing that brings greater joy to my heart than witnessing our students from all walks of life strive be it in academics, sports, or cultural activities. I have always believed that university is not a place only meant for academics but rather a place where a festival of ideas are hosted. It is a place that encourages learning and unlearning practises that we are accustomed to in order to be better citizens once we finish our varsity chapter in life.

I must admit that I was a bit worried about how my political affiliation would impact how our community viewed me as a leader because reality is Stellenbosch University does not have the same political atmosphere as other institutions in South Africa. Despite knowing that my heart was in the right place and that I had the best interest at heart for all the students in our community. I was faced with a lot of challenges to the extent that at times I was accused of pushing a political agenda. Reality is politics influences everything in our daily lives and as a student I believe if we do not take up these spaces and begin to be active, we may lose our beloved country.

I look forward to serving you all for the duration of my term and I look forward to the good and bad times that we will face as a community. My only wish is to leave Stellenbosch University a better place and witness it become a place a where all feel welcomed.

Below is a quote by Steve Biko that I would like to share with you all that has shaped me to be the leader that I am today, and I can only hope it will inspire one of you.

“People must be aware of their problems in a realistic way. They must be able to analyse their problems and to work out common solutions. In other words, a community is easily divided when their perception of the same thing is different.”— Steve Biko

Constitutional Responsibilities – Secretary General

As per section 28 (3) of the Student Constitution my role/duties as the Secretary-General of the SRC includes:

- Being responsible for maintaining internal communication within the SRC.
- Being responsible for managing knowledge and institutional memory within the SRC.
- Being responsible for ensuring that SRC meetings, and any other meetings or consultations where the SRC require record-keeping, are properly recorded.
- Being responsible for updating, safekeeping, and making available records, recordings, policies, and other documents of the SRC, subject to the internal rules of the SRC.
- Being responsible for providing the Student Imbizo Convener and Speaker of the Students' Assembly with a regularly updated document detailing which SRC members serve on which specific university committees.

Constitutional Responsibilities – Student Financial Access

As per the Student Constitution my role/duties as the Student Financial Access portfolio holder of the SRC includes:

- To act in the best interest of students and to actively promote students' rights under CHAPTER 2.
- To represent students at – (a) The University Council. (b) The Senate. (c) The Institutional Forum. (d) Other committees, structures, and functionaries of the University. (e) National and international student structures.
- To evaluate the University policy and give input in the formulation thereof.
- To formulate and maintain policy to ensure that the SRC performs its functions and duties effectively.
- To facilitate projects and initiatives to the benefit of students.
- To inform students continuously, and obtain feedback, about its activities.

Portfolio Overview – Secretary General

Within the SRC my role as the Secretary-General is to maintain internal communication within the SRC, this means ensuring that there is effective communication on all communication lines (Email, MS Teams and WhatsApp etc.) and ensuring that SRC members are well informed on all relevant information. My role further includes coordinating General SRC and SRC Executive Committee meetings and to ensure that the necessary documents for these meetings such as Agenda's, Minutes and any other additional documents are made available. My role also includes proper recordkeeping of these meetings. I am also responsible for drafting statements.

On an institutional level, my role is to ensure the availability of all the updated SRC records, reports, agendas, minutes, policies, etc through uploading them onto the SRC website to maintain institutional knowledge. My role on an institutional level also requires me to coordinate SRC (and SRC Executive) meetings with staff such as the Management of the Division of Student Affairs and the Stellenbosch University Rectorate and to also ensure proper recordkeeping of these meetings.

On a national level my role as the Secretary-General is to serve as a representative of the university at all designated meetings of the South African Union of Students (SAUS) and to ensure that the outcomes of these meetings are well communicated with the SRC. My role further includes liaising with the SRC's of various other institutions in South Africa to ensure that there is sharing of valuable information and effective communication between universities.

Portfolio Overview – Student Financial Access

The duties and responsibilities as Student Financial Access head include Liaising with Funding offices and social workers, providing financial literacy programmes/workshops for students (especially vulnerable students). Ensuring accessibility of work opportunities on campuses, educating SRC members on funding matters and processes. Being a port of call for students with financial exclusion and difficulty concerns, generally working on improving financial accessibility in the institution.

Committees/Task Teams – Secretary General

I serve on the following Committees and or Task Teams:

Council

- This is the highest governance body of Stellenbosch University. It oversees Management and holds them to account. Appoints management of the institution. It further takes strategic decisions and approves policies of the institution.
- There are no compulsory portfolios that must sit on this committee all the elected SRC members have the opportunity to stand for a seat at Council. I strongly advice that future SRC keep it this way as the Chairperson and Secretary-General serve on this committee.
- Council is currently chaired by the acting chairperson Nicky Newton-King and the secretariat Dr Ronel Retief.
- Throughout my term I will only sit in a total of 4 meetings. I have sat two the first meeting was on the 26th of September 2022 and the second sitting was on the 28th of November.
- The Council agenda is typically made up of over 400 pages. So, it is important that we go through the agenda and identify points that we would like to argue in the best of the institution.
- Unfortunately, most of the information tabled at this committee is regarded as confidential.
- In the meeting to follow in March Council had a special meeting where the Khampepe report was discussed, and management unpacked their strategy on how certain recommendations would be handled.

Quality Committee

- Is responsible for the criteria for evaluating quality assurance of departments both academic & non-academic and provide submission of recommendations on how departments can improve their quality.
- Concerns often raised at the committee meeting are issues faced by departments in ensuring that they achieve the standards required of them by the committee.
- Recommendations shared by each department on how they can improve their quality or operations in general.
- As a student, you are tasked with reading through the issues & recommendations prior and adding any extra recommendations during the meeting.
- You're also tasked with contesting certain recommendations as the committee member and how they can be improved to fit the current environment.
- This committee is chaired by Prof Deresh and the secretariat is Muller, Andre.
- This committee has also sat on two times and the frequency of meetings varies.

South African Union of Students (SAUS)

South African Union of Students (SAUS) is a students' structure that was officially launched in April of 2006, led by President: Yandisa Ndzoyiya, Secretary General: Lukhanyo Daweti and three members in their executive. SAUS aims to consolidate and strengthen students' view in the governance and enhancement of Higher Education and Training in South Africa. They are committed to building a unified, equitable, non-sexist, non-racial, democratic and well governed education system that is appropriate and responsive to the needs of South Africa, Africa and the world and which provides a conducive environment for learning, teaching and research and community service.

They believe that education, through excellence in learning, teaching and research and community service, must positively respond to the needs of both students and the economic, social, cultural and political development imperatives and needs of our country, region, continent and the world. Their objectives are to promote the development of an education system that provides equity of access, opportunity and outcomes and positively responds to the needs of both students and economic, social, cultural and needs of our country, region, and continent.

All 26 public universities form part of this Union. It is a very powerful platform if used correctly. It is important to note that it is a very political space. So, if you are not one used robust engagements you will not like the space because you simply will not understand how comrades behave. I strongly believe that

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every institution should be affiliated to this union because the engagements held there are extremely important. And you form relations with other institutions where crucial knowledge is shared.

Committees/Task Teams – Student Financial Access

I serve on the following Committees and or Task Teams:

Student Debt Working Group (SDWG)

- The SDWG is an institutional committee that deals with student debt in order to assist students' clear their debt so that they can register. Undergraduate Bursaries Office, Postgraduate Office, Student Fees as well as the Student Representative Council (SRC), are all represented on the Working Group.
- The first meeting was on the 19th of January 2023 which was too late. Thereafter we meet every Tuesday and Thursdays for two hours to review each case.
- I believe that this working group should have their first sitting with the new SRCs in November of December at least. Everyone knows by the 24th of December that they have outstanding debt, forms for the working group should be released that early already.
- The committee began with a budget of R3.4 million and the SRC added R150k and R800k.
- The committee continued to assist students even after registration had closed. The committee has still not closed.

NSFAS (Residence Cap) Contingency Committee

This committee was created this year in light of the NSFAS R45k cap on accommodation allowance. This cap sparked panic amongst our students and Rectorate decided the best way to deal with it is to create this contingency committee. The committee is chaired by Dr Ronel Retief, the committee includes two representatives from the SRC, placement office, finance department, Alumni relations division, Student Affairs, and the legal division.

To this date the 23rd of February 2023 the committee has sat five times and all these meetings were centred around finding sustainable solutions in overcoming this obstacle. The committee has identified just over 300 students that will be affected by this cap. I am not sure I am allowed to disclose the amount that has been raised so far to assist students with a top up that may have a shortfall. I do not think this sitting will take place next year.

Bursaries and Loans

- This committee is chaired by Prof Deresh.
- It deals with all the bursary and loans related things such as funding budget decisions and approves requests for money to be used out of their reserves.
- Due to confidentiality what is discussed in the meetings cannot be disclosed.
- This committee has only had one sitting in March.

Term 2 Overview – Secretary General & Student Financial Access

In this section I will be discussing what I have done in my second term:

This term was particularly quite challenging for me, I had a difficult time balancing my academics and assisting students because although registration supposedly ended when classes started that was not the case for me and few of my fellow colleagues. The beginning of this term took a toll not only on our mental and physical health but also on our academic performance. As leaders who promised to serve our students as best as we could, through the good and difficult times we could not simply attend class and ignore all the challenges our students were facing. That meant that we had to sacrifice our academic lives. Our students were still facing challenges relating to fee blocks because of debt, many students were still without accommodation, we still had students arriving at our offices who were first years that arrived late and students who were facing challenges with securing food. The nature of being in the SRC is that you are the first stop for many students who need assistance, once classes began, we still had to assist students who found it difficult to come to terms with their readmission outcomes. As someone who has been through the process it was heart-breaking.

I would have hope to achieve a lot during this term, but it was rather difficult due to time. This felt like the shortest term I have ever experienced as a student at SU. That is simply because while students had returned to classes I had to be put those on hold and attend institutional meetings where the voice of our students was needed. I found that my SG and Student Financial Access work became one. Because the first term is largely advocating for access at all these seats we are given.

Because I sit on the Student Debt Working Group, we had to chase the deadline of having all responses out by the 3rd of March. That meant sitting in meetings from 9 am to 4pm almost every day. The committee has still not closed yet as some late applications are still being considered, so that means having to avail ourselves from time to time. One of the best decisions we made was to negotiate with management at the beginning of the year to extend registration and after registration had closed William and I had negotiated for the registration for some students even after registration had closed. It is very important to build good relationships with the management of the institution they will be able to solve many of your challenges before things get out of hand.

The Chairperson and I also attended a SAUS meeting in March along with the Transformation Officer in Durban. On the first day we discussed issues around GBV in our country, the program began late because

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some of the ministers were late. However, once the program began it was rather a fruitful engagement where Mx Abongile Quthu made valuable inputs where our institution was praised and referred to after their contribution. The following day we had a NEC meeting as ex-officos of the SAUS executive we were there to discuss issues around NSFAS and registration. It was disappointing however how NSFAS officials did not show up that meant we could not have a fruitful engagement. The presenters that were spoke about financial access and bringing in the mining sector to donate towards student debt. The efforts are noted however, I raised that we need to stop focusing on only raising funds we need look at more sustainable solutions such as the Dell Young Leaders program in our institution. I proposed that the mining industry think about this all-round support system to ensure that students succeed. As I have mentioned before SAUS is a very important platform as much as it has its flaws, we learn so much from each other and also depends on your level of engagement and networking with other institutions. One thing it has done is to bring our Western Cape SRCs together and I hope future SRCs continue these relations you cannot do this line of work on your own.

SRC meeting continued on a bi-weekly basis, my scribe is now able to provide meeting minutes much faster than me having to do it on my own. I conducted a survey to find out how our members were feeling, and it most indicated that they would rather have the meetings in the SRC boardroom therefore that is why we have not been to residences. James and I wanted to conduct a study on how our students feel about SRC meetings we have not been able to send out that mass mailer due to the fact that they have not been answering our mails.

The current challenge that we are facing and working on is to increase the night shuttle capacity as our students have been complaining that the demand is not meeting the supply.

I have also embarked to do my honours research on the universities shuttle services, this will be my last contribution to the student community as my university journey comes to an end. My thesis is titled "A New Era: Investigating the Feasibility and Benefits of expanding the Day Shuttle at Stellenbosch University". It is about time the university starts taking the needs of commuting students that cannot afford to use public transport every day serious. I have noted our students cries for a day shuttle and I plan to present this to management for a potential solution.

Budget

Out of my Secretary General Budget I have used R1500 for my scribe which I budgeted R4500. From Student Financial Access I have not utilized any amount.

Plans for Next Term

I plan on doing the following:

I plan on continuing working on how we can better communicate to our students and making improvements to our website.

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I still plan on having the political lectures however our speakers keep cancelling on us.

I plan on submitting my proposal to the have the Annual SRC Fundraising Gala Dinner which will happen in June/July.