



Stellenbosch

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SRC

Students' Representative Council
Ibhunga elimele abafundi
Studenteraad



SRC TERM 3 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.
- Since the March meeting the institution has since created CIRCoRe workstreams, which have been developing their TORs and PoAs, started on their deliberations, identified remits, questions and areas of information and research, etc. The workstreams have laid down meeting dates and plans for deliberation and action over the next six months and beyond.
- One key issue is for each workstream to develop short-term proposals during this period as part of the medium and longer-term proposal developments.
- I sat my last Council meeting in June where Council members had to vote on whether they thought the Rector should be dismissed from office because of the Nepotism case against him. By now it is public knowledge that the motion did not pass. The decision was based on the external investigation that was done by a former judge.

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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.
- I had to send my apologies for meeting that was held in May as I was writing a test that day.

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 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.

Simplifying structures, policies, regulations / align with institutional objectives – CIRCoRe Workstream

- I currently serve on this workstream, which has monthly meetings I have been present to all expect once a month
- **Below are some matters that are being rolled out / attended to:**
 1. Workstreams are co-opting additional members based on identified areas of expertise and representativity.
 2. We're setting up the campus dialogue facilitation function for roll-out across campus and with external stakeholders and partners from August 2023.
 3. We are conducting some data and information-gathering and targeted research as requested by the workstreams.
 4. We are developing an institutional permission and ethics protocol for all our campus information-gathering and research processes. That will gather data, conduct research, and run dialogue processes at the institution.
- The workstream is currently chaired by Dr Leslie Van Rooi.

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.

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- 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 3 Overview – Secretary General & Student Financial Access

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

This term felt particularly short due to the examination season. There were a few challenges that arose it was difficult to convene SRC meetings as in most meetings we did not meet quorum and most members of the SRC had academic commitments. We tried to relay information as best as we could to the larger student community. Accessing the SRC mass mailer was still proving to be a challenge because of the processes we had to go through. However, we have since been informed that we no longer have to translate all communication. This has been a problem for students because they have requested this on a number of occasions. We only had one Rectorate meeting and a number of issues were raised such as Nsfas challenges and summer school fees. The response from management was positive because they agreed to look at avenues such as the wrap around support program, they plan on introducing next year and perhaps incorporate it in there.

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Nsfas still remains as a challenge for many of our students and we have been in constant consultations with the other SRCs in the country. The most memorable moment in my term was being able to unify all SRCs in the fight against Nsfas. Following the forum that I had created we continued to meet on a regular basis. One of the resolutions that were taken in one of our meetings was to have a peaceful march to Nsfas offices. This march took place in May where we handed over a memorandum to the CFO. Some of our demands was the immediate release of all Nsfas appeals, removal of the 60 credit, removal the 45K cap on accommodation allowance and an immediate end to the direct payment system. We have always been clear on not wanting this system dating back to last year November. Nsfas has not answered our memorandum. In June we further had a meeting with Nsfas officials, Coinvest and the CUBL reps. We made it clear that we still reject this system as there were no clear answers that were given to us. We requested that they station Coinvest reps on our campus and to date they have only been on our campuses for a week.

UKZN Youth Day program

During the month of June around the 16th the Vice-Chairperson and I attended a Youth Day Indaba that was hosted by UKZN and DUT. The purpose of this Indaba is to provide a platform for open and constructive dialogue, strategizing among SRCs in South African higher education. Key objectives of the Indaba: - Foster dialogue and collaboration among public universities in South Africa. - Discuss the current challenges and opportunities in the higher education sector, and the remanence to the persistence struggles in the sector to those of the - Share successful strategies and initiatives to foster political education in institutions of higher learning. - Strengthen networks and partnerships for enhanced cooperation going forward. Some of the key take aways that we learnt on this trip is how their SRC elections are run. In both institutions they contest through organisations and societies such as political organisations. Currently both institutions are led by the EFFSC. During their election season there is a minimum of about 10 000 voter turn-out. Which is amazing compared to the 2000+ turn out in our campuses. They also felt their turn out was pretty low. All institutions expressed their disappointments in the decline in student activism across the country compared to the youth of 76. Some of the things they have put in place is the mass election drive where there are rallies in residences and t-shirts are give out to students. Their voting also takes place in person which encourages student to participate. Both institutions expressed that they believe community programs play a bog role in achieving unity amongst their students. Some of the programs that were taking place during this indaba that we had the honour of attending was the sports day were some SRC members were playing against other student structures. Furthermore, there was a talent show. All events aimed at empowering their students. We have a crisis when it comes to leadership and student participation across all of our universities.

I hosted a COB Indaba which was aimed at providing clarity to our students on how it works specifically Nsfas students who have depleted their funds. I have representatives from Bursaries and Loans to attend that day. The event was successful and students requested that their house committees please include such topics during their house meetings.

Budget

Scribe – R1500

June 16 Indaba – R 10 660

COB Indaba (Catering) – R 7 560

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.

I plan on doing my handover documents as our term is coming to an end.

I have completed the Annual SRC Gala dinner proposal to fundraise for next year's student debt and it will need the next SRC to execute it.