



Stellenbosch

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SRC

Students' Representative Council
Ibhunga elimele abafundi
Studenteraad



SRC TERM I 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 affiliations 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 students 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

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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.

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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 to coordinate 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. My is not only limited in these duties 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 – Secretary General

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 we will discussing the Khampepe Report where management will be presenting their plans and timeline.

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.

Registration Planning

- I would not necessarily call this one a committee but rather a task team. That deals with the planning of registration and ensuring it runs as smoothly as possible. The task team was chaired by Mr Ashmind the Deputy Registrar.
- The team held meetings every Wednesday from the beginning of this year until registration was nearing an end. Representatives from Faculty administrators, Centre of Students Communities, Finance Division, Admission etc, where all part of these meetings.
- The meetings were to discuss any problems that arise during registration and share any information that we believe is necessary. We raised many of the issues that students on the ground were experiencing. Such issues relayed to readmission feedback, registration glitches, final offers for first years and postgraduate students.
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Registration Workshop (Student Governance)

- This workshop is organised by Student governance for all student leaders in all structures.
- It is organised by Thulani and SG interns. The aim of this training is to ensure that student leaders are aware of how the registration period works and are well prepared.
- Different divisions in the institution present to the student leaders such as Bursaries and Loans, Accommodations, Finance, and the Registrars division.
- It gives students the opportunity to ask any questions in real time and ensure they are well prepared to assist their students.
- From the SRC you will be required to provide an overview of what the SRC has in place for the registration period. Which is normally done by the SRC Chair and AAC Chair.
- My role was to ensure both days have program directors.

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. 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.

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.

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 has not sat yet. The first sitting that I will be present for is in March.

Term I Overview

In this section I will be providing a overview of what I have done in my Term

SRC Elections

The SRC elections where quite a draining period yet I learnt so much from it. The week entailed a lot from groundwork and grilling from the SRC caucuses. Ultimately when the results came out, I was thrilled to have gotten the most vote but at the same time I was filled with disappointment due to the low numbers of the overall number of votes. It is always disappointing to see the youth not wanting to participate in such activities. I strongly believe that SU needs to review how they hold SRC elections.

After the elections were concluded we then held the chairperson elections. Naturally which I ran because I knew my capabilities and understood the SRC space but ultimately, I guess my colleagues did not feel I was the right person for the position despite what the students were saying through the polls. I am a person that is quick to move from such situations however I do feel that these elections pretty much set the tone for the SRC term. The delay in electing other executive members resulted in our work piling up and not enough time for us to actually settle in our roles. Which is something I can admit to I slacked in certain areas due to the amount of pressure I was under the administrative work and my academics.

To solve these power dynamics and over burdening the incoming SRC I believe SU needs to review its election processes and look at the possibilities that every member in the SRC is voted in. So, people should run for the positions that they want withing the SRC. Judging from other institutions this is working well in terms of team dynamics and it allows the student population to have a say who they see fit in what position. Of cause conflict will always be there but it will not be because of power dynamics. I believe it improve our overall voting turn out as well.

Kayamandi Shuttle

Our official term in office began on the 12th of September 2022. It began on a high note where we were faced with the shuttle problem. For context in June/July the previous SRC announced that the shuttle to Kayamandi would be suspended, the reasons at the time where due to a taxi strike. However, the services never resumed. The issue was then bought to our SRC several times, so I took it upon myself to investigate the issue at hand. I firstly enquired what is going from the universities transport division I contacted, Pieter Wever [paw@sun.ac.za]. The response I was given was that the Kayamandi Taxi Association did not allow the university shuttles in the area and they were not willing to come to the table. Prince Q Qengqa and myself then took it upon ourselves to go to the association and find out what the issue was. The response from the association was positive and they were willing to negotiate with the university. The negotiations took place and the shuttle resumed.

We are aware of the fact that there is now a capacity issue, and we are going to put the request forward to the relevant stakeholders to please increase the capacity.

SRC Meetings

At the beginning of my term, I had a thorough handover with my predecessor. It took about 3 hours to get through everything that I needed to know. One of the key points of discussion was how to access and use the sr@sun mailbox. Because of the delay in appointing managers the Vice Chairperson of the SRC assisted with the mailbox in the meantime. We then went through how I can use all the tools that Microsoft has to offer to my benefit. The former SG then gave me access to the SRC teams channel and added all the SRC members. I then cleaned it up a bit and better organised it.

I then had to create templates for our SRC, DSAF and Rectorate meetings. I created templates for the agenda and minutes with the new university logos. The executive then agreed that SRC meetings would be on Wednesday on a bi-weekly basis. And the executive would meet on Thursdays. All meetings are scheduled on teams. The agendas is released every Monday to the student community. I then also had to arrange the residences that the meetings will be held at to increase visibility. The SRC has links to submit their agenda point and the student community can email me any point they would like to add for any meeting even DSAF and Rectorate meetings.

This role requires you to do a lot of admin and at times I do feel overwhelmed but I can only hope that now that I have a scribe who will be getting paid R1500 per term things will get better. I therefore recommend that SU looks at creating a Deputy Secretary-General position so that the workload can be shared.

#Access4All

We have been brainstorming ways in which the SRC can assist the student community with student debt, and as you may know in the past the SRC had been running the #RegisterAll campaign to assist our students. However, when we came into office, we came to the fast realization that this campaign is indeed outdated and there is no clear direction as to how funds were mobilized outside the SRC reserve funds. This method is not sustainable and due to the lack of funds the previous SRCs have not been able to assist a number of students.

Although the #RegisterALL Campaign has shown great impact, the SRC Executive Committee (EC) of 2022/2023 has identified the need to re-evaluate the #RegisterAll Campaign and rebrand the campaign in order to revive it again and make it more sustainable. The SRC (EC) then renamed the #RegisterALL Campaign to #Access4All, which aligns with the institutions efforts to promote access, inclusivity and equity.

We had a meeting with Student Governance to seek guidance and advise about the possibility of having a cost centre specifically dedicated to this campaign so that the SRC can continue to fundraise throughout the year. We were advised to communicate with the Division of Student Affairs in order to ask for permission to open a cost centre that will be under Student Governance. The cost centre then has since been created.

I am disappointed at the delays we have experienced with this campaign we have ran into a number of delays however we will still launch the campaign and fundraise throughout the year.

Readmission fee waiver

Readmission is a topic very close to my heart and someone that has been through this process I understand the traumas of going through it. I negotiated with the Deputy Registrar in collaborations with the AAC Chair that students that are funded by NSFAS and those that cannot afford the fee should have their fee waived. This was a great initiative on our end as it assisted 195 students whose readmission fee was waived.

Readmission & Historical Debt live stream

Stellenbosch university released communication on academic exclusion on the 24th of December 2022. Now this is a terrible time for students because they are far away from people that can advise them. So I thought of a live session to provide our students with information because I understand the uncertainty readmission comes with. The session was on Instagram and on Teams which was recorded. I do understand of course that not everyone can access internet when they are at home but all the information was still shared on the website and on whatsapp and our social media pages. This was done from a good place to show our students they are not alone and we are here to assist even during the holiday. And unfortunately, we do not have the financial capacity provide all students with Data.

2023 Registration and Orientation proposal

I presented the registration and orientation proposal to the executive last year and it was approved by 4 members of the executive. I then shared it with the rest of the team where the plan proposed that we split ourselves into two groups. One group that dealt with Registration and the other Orientation. I gave each member an opportunity to sign up for the working group that they wish to see themselves in. This was because I believe that people should do what they feel most patient about. All SRC members expect for Masilo, Tayo, Yaadein and Elousie did not sign up which I had to allocate to their groups. It was very disappointing that they the chairperson did not attend any of the planning meetings.

This way worked for me because I believe that we handled the registration very well. As tired as we are we worked tirelessly to ensure that students were assisted as best as we knew. There were many ups and downs, but I believe it bought us together. We collaborated with the EFFSC and SASCO, as much as I appreciate the work, they have done I do not recommend that this should be done in the future.

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Purely because SASCO began acting like they are now part of the SRC and boundaries were lost. It is surprising because the SRC and student organizations worked well in the past. I am disappointed in their actions because intentions were pure from our side and we were looking forward to the collaboration.

SAUS Meetings

On the 16th of September the chairperson and I travelled to Pretoria for a SAUS meeting. The South African Union of Students legal and policy subcommittee hosted a SAUS Protest Causality dialogue with different stakeholders including the Student Representatives Council (SRC's) from all 26 institutions. The aim of this dialogue is to assist find ways on how the student protests in institutions of higher learning can be handled in a much better approach as compared to the previous years where we end up seeing cases of arson reported, assault, injuries, and destruction of property. Although the meeting was brief there was very valuable advice and words of encouragement that was exchanged between the universities that were there.

The South African Union of Students will be hosting the national general council on the 10th -13th of November 2022 at the University of Mpumalanga. As Exofficious to the directly elected SAUS National Executive Committee Members you are invited to participate in this important gathering. Each institutions is required to bring a total of five delegates, SRC Presidents and Secretary Generals are part of the five delegation, or any other delegated SRC officer to represent SRC President / Secretary General. The key focus areas of the NGC are as follows: Student funding model, Analysis of the registration preparedness for 2023 academic year, NSFAS funding guidelines for 2023, Policy review of SAUS, constitution and SAUS Code of Conduct , and SAUS Strategic Plan Support. Because we are not affiliated with the structure we could not participate in the taking of any decisions.

This was the most constructive meeting we had be had the opportunity to engage the Minister Dr Blade Nzimande. I engaged him on the Khampepe Report and he assured me that his department will be following up on the progress with the university Council.

I must however stress how worried I am about how much the travelling costs are impacting our budget. This is due to the fact that flights are so expensive due to the economical state we are in. I think all of you are aware of the unreasonable flight fares. I can only hope that this will be resolved in the future I believe it is important that our institutions is represented on this platform because our institutions tends to be undermined and we have to raise the challenges we face and build relationships with other institutions as we do not live on a island.

Plans for Next Term – Secretary General

I plan on doing the following in the next term;

1. I plan on being better organised ensuring that I work closely with the Communications Officer in updating our website.
2. We plan on coming up with a more creative way of releasing agendas and creating summaries of minutes that can be easily shared.
3. Working closely with the Research officer to investigate on ways as to why our students do not attend meetings and what can we do to ensure that we improve.
4. The communications officer and I are in the process of compiling an almanac for the SRC, but we need the full corporation from our SRC members currently only KUKO has submitted their dates.
5. I plan on hosting a political lecturer in collaboration with Banzi and Prince.

Plans for Next Term – Student financial Access

I plan on doing the following in the next term;

1. I plan on collaborating with student fees on raising awareness around COB and how students can plan it throughout the year.
2. I plan on implementing weekly meetings will Bursaries and Loans to ensure that we have weekly meetings and figure out ways to increase accessibility to bursaries.
3. We would like to host a Gala Dinner to fundraise for student debt.