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SRC

Students' Representative Council
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Studenteraad



SRC 2024 TERM 2 REPORT

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Foreword

Good day, fellow Maties!

I sincerely hope that you are all well-rested and ready for the 2nd academic term of 2024!

I would like to start off by thanking you for taking the time to read the Special Needs Portfolio term report. This report will provide you with a summary of what I, the Special Needs Manager of the SRC, have been busy with during my second term back in office.

During this term in office, my main priority was engaging on an interpersonal level with my fellow Maties and visitors to our worldclass institution, whilst representing the needs of the community of Maties with Special Needs. It has been a pleasure to serve the community of Maties with special needs, of which I am a proud member.

Early in 2021, during a residence education session on Special Needs hosted by the SRC, I finally felt comfortable expressing, in a public space, that I have Spectrum Disorder. I have never felt uncomfortable with this part of myself, but was always concerned with how others would react to it. That day I decided that I would commit myself to improving the well-being of others like myself.

As the Manager for Special Needs I am able to, and shall continue, with this commitment. "The greatest honour in life is to help others overcome the challenges which you too have striven to overcome".

Constitutional Responsibilities

According to the student constitution, my constitutional responsibilities are the following:

- I am required to attend at least one SRC meeting per academic term.
- It is my responsibility to prepare the Special Needs Portfolio budget for my term in office.

Portfolio Overview

The following is the function of the Special Needs Manager within the SRC leadership structure and the student body, as per the 'student leadership job description' document of the SRC:

“The main function of this role is to entrench representation and advocate for the issues of students with disabilities within the SRC structure. In addition, it is also about furthering their integration into the SU campus and general society at large. Achieving the above imperative entails working with various structures that seek to represent matters of minority communities on campus, such as the Disability Unit, Equality Unit and Transformation Office.”

In addition to the above, I believe that the acquisition of knowledge and insight regarding the grievances and recommendations of Maties with special needs in terms of facilities and support available is of utmost importance. I shall, therefore, be working closely with the Dis Maties Council and the Disability Unit to plan possible means of improving channels through which grievances and recommendations can be obtained and documented, allowing for effective strategies to be implemented and plans drafted in future.

The following goals have also been outlined as part of the Special Needs Portfolio year plan:

- Ensuring students are provided a platform to engage in self-advocacy.
- Facilitating communication and providing input so that students with disabilities are at the centre of decisions that affect them.
- Full participation in campus life and academic activities are granted to every disabled student.
- Ensuring all aspects of the disabled student are considered when decisions are made.
- Promote inclusivity in language, structure, and facilities.

Committees/Task Teams

I serve on the following Committees and or Task Teams:

Student Institutional Transformation Committee

During my first term in office last year, I was appointed to serve as a member of the SITC. This is a leadership structure formulated by the Transformation Office which aims to address all transformation-related challenges and issues experienced by the broader Stellenbosch University student population. I serve on the SITC in the capacity of an interest group representative. At our first sitting last year, the function and purpose of the SITC was discussed.

Student Life/Communities workstream on the CIRCoRe project following the Khampepe Report

In my third term in office last year, I was approached by the Disability Unit to serve in the Student Life/Communities workstream on the CIRCoRe project which was established following the Khampepe Report. I am most excited for what can be done to improve the well-being of Maties with Special Needs through their representation and consideration as part of this project.

Concessions Reviewal Committee

During my first term in office this year, I was approached by the Disability Unit regarding the university's concessions reviewal committee. The purpose of this committee is the reviewal of all concession applications. I have been asked to serve as a student representative on this committee. Final approval of my membership is pending. I currently serve as a channel of communication for student concerns regarding concessions. At the Disability Unit quarterly meeting which I attended earlier this year, I voiced the concerns of the student community regarding the lack of renewed concession letters and requested that an update be circulated to academic staff and the student community. The Registrar of the University has recently sent out communication providing that 2023 concessions granted for the duration of an academic program are still valid. I hope that this will serve to alleviate student concerns.

Introductions Committee (Campus Liaison)

The Introductions Committee can be seen as a revised version of the Roadshow Committee of 2023, of which I was apart. This is an internal SRC Committee responsible for introducing the newcomer students to the SRC and its various roles and portfolios. With Campus Liaison being a new role, I was granted permission to 'give purpose to the role' so to speak. More about this role was provided in the Overview Section of my Term I Report.

Term 2 Overview

My second term back in office has been one of personal growth and interpersonal interaction. Whether it be having public discussions, heart-to-heart talks, or insightful dialogues with persons from all walks of life, I have done my best to open up and engage on an interpersonal level with my fellow Maties and visitors to our fine institution. The sharing of lived experiences and listening to the stories of one's fellow person grants greater imperative to continue striving for the well-being of my fellow Maties and empathise with our shared struggles. I hope that, through this approach, I have been able to reach more students than I would otherwise have been able to. With the support of my fellow SRC members, the kind staff of the Disability Unit, and Student Governance, I managed to do all the following:

Participation in the LIV SU-VOC Program

During my 2nd term in office, I was approached by student governance to participate in a LIV program between Stellenbosch University and the Danish Institution of VUC Storstrøm, at which I would represent the interests of Maties with Special Needs. This program took place during the recent semester break. I am thankful for this opportunity and the platform it provided me with to learn more from my fellow learning partners and, in turn, provide them with insights regarding special needs at Stellenbosch University and greater South African society.

Participation in the Lead with Disability Program

During my 2nd term in office, I was approached by the Disability Unit to participate in the Lead with Disability program offered by the DU for Stellenbosch students. I am thankful for the opportunity to have presented my student and lived experience as a person with a disability during one in-person and one online session and hope that my fellow Maties found it both insightful and useful in the completion of their assigned tasks as part of the program. In the words of Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

Provision of Portfolio Feedback

As an appointed Manager of the SRC, I have a constitutional obligation to attend one SRC meeting per academic term. During my 2nd term in office, I have provided feedback on the Special Needs Portfolio regarding my 1st term in office. This can be found in my 1st Term Report on the SRC website. At these meetings, I seek to provide my fellow SRC Members with insight into several of the struggles experienced by Maties with special needs. It is my hope that through the creation of awareness, greater emphasis will be placed on the well-being of Maties with special needs.

Communication with the Disability Unit

During my 2nd term back in office, I have been in communication with the Disability Unit and its kind staff including, but not limited to, the following: Dr Lyner-Cleophas;; Luigia Nicholas; Lizelle Apollis. The topics discussed ranged from the raising of queries regarding student assistance to the use of the SRC Wheelchairs. I have provided the Disability Unit and SRC with feedback on my activities and am pleased with the progress that has been made thus far.

Assisting students with Special Needs

Whether it be assisting student communities with catering for the interests and needs of students with Special Needs or answering concessions and accessibility related questions, I have availed myself to be of assistance to the community of Maties with Special Needs. Having once been in the position of a Newcomer with Special Needs, I am pleased with cooperative spirit I have experienced within the institution, with notable examples being the Disability Unit and Student Governance. It is my belief that, although it is certainly not always easy, one can find assistance at our compassionate institution if one reaches out to those best able to help.

SRC Wheelchair Policy

It came to my attention during the 2023 welcoming period that, as the Student Representative Council, we were ill equipped to assist student with physical disabilities. This was largely because of a lack of access

to wheelchairs. Being a student with a disability, I understand the anxiety that can be experienced by a newcomer student because of feeling excluded and not catered for. I made use of a donation provided by DTConsult to acquire 2 brand new wheelchairs for use by SRC members in assisting students when necessary. It has become evident that a policy is necessary to provide for the use and maintenance of the wheelchairs to ensure satisfactory upkeep and management of these assets. I have taken it upon myself to initiate the drafting of an SRC Wheelchair Policy. This, I hope, will alleviate any confusion, and streamline the use of these most important assets. At an internal SRC meeting during this next term in office, I shall discuss the use of the 2 wheelchairs with my fellow SRC colleagues.

Other Matters:

As a result of the Concessions Awareness and Accessibility talks that I conducted at several residences and CSCs, as part of the SRC Roadshow Task Team, I have been able to assist several students with the sourcing of the required concessions applications forms and the circulating of accessibility guidelines to relevant stakeholders. As matters pertaining to Special Needs arise, whether in relation to residence spaces or facilities to mention but two, I make sure to inform the relevant university structures of said matters. The duty of an SRC member to serve as a voice for students within student governance and relevant university institutions is one which I feel passionately about.

Plans for Next Term

Unlike my 1st term in office for the 2022-2023 period, which was more administrative in nature, I have continued to challenge myself to be more interpersonal in my interactions with my fellow students and student leaders, despite this sometimes being a challenge for myself. Unlike many portfolios on the SRC, mine has proven to be more fluid in its activities. I commit myself to continue assisting the Disability Unit and other stakeholders where I am asked and able to. As matters arise, as they always do, I shall engage them with a spirit of engagement and cooperation. I hope to continue assisting the Disability Unit with its 'sensory space' endeavour and continue serving a link between students and relevant university stakeholders. Together with my fellow SRC members whom I have come to greatly appreciate during this 2nd term in office, I am certain that we shall continue to serve with A SPIRIT.