



SRC 2020/2021 Term I Report

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Constitutional Responsibilities

According to the Stellenbosch University Student Constitution, 2018, the Secretary is at least responsible for:

- Maintaining internal communication within the SRC.
- Managing knowledge and institutional memory within the SRC.
- Ensuring that SRC meetings, and any other meetings or consultations where the SRC desired record keeping, are properly recorded; and
- Updating, safekeeping and making available records, policies, and other documents of the SRC.

Portfolio Overview

The role of the Secretary General while simple on paper is quite complex in practice.

Role in the SRC

The Secretary General is primarily responsible to uphold internal communication within the SRC.

This means that the Secretary General makes all relevant documents available to the SRC, including, but not limited to, the minutes and agendas of SRC meetings, the minutes, and agendas of Executive Committee meetings as well as the minutes and agendas of Executive SRC Members and Management meetings.

What is notable about this is that internal communication is most definitely, not limited to these formal circumstances. Because of this extension of definition, additional responsibilities befall the Secretary General such as keeping members and managers of the SRC on the various happenings and stances of the SRC.

The Secretary General is also responsible to ensure smooth communication lines within the SRC, using different platforms, including, but not limited to, emails and cell phone communication.

Role in the University

The role of the Secretary General in the context of the University stretches as far as maintaining communication lines with the Rector's Management Team. The Secretary General is responsible to set up the agenda as well as to minute all meetings held between the Rectorate and the SRC Executive. They are also responsible to make these minutes and agendas available to all the people included in the SRC Executive and Management meetings contact list (listed in important contacts).

Further, the Secretary General plays a pivotal role as the direct communicating link between the SRC and the Rectorate Management Team

Role in South Africa

SRC's around the country have a very important role to play in representing students on the different campuses. The Secretary General is an Executive position in all SRC's, plays a very important role a store of and main point of access for SRC Members and managers, Management, and students to all information relevant to the SRC. When Secretary Generals from various University's hold effective communication it helps unify the students of South Africa especially in extraordinary circumstances such as the ongoing pandemic.





Committees / Task Teams

- Workstream for Student Services
- SRC Executive Committee
- RegisterAll Task Team

Budget Overview

- Data: R900.00
- Mass Communication Emails: R9000.00 (6x R1500.00)
- Discretionary Funds: R1000.00

Term Overview

Getting started

I was contacted by our chairperson to inform me that nobody had indicated Secretary-General as their preferred portfolio. Given that I had expressed interest in the Communications Officer portfolio and given that these two portfolios would be merged in our term, he asked whether I would be interested in the SG portfolio. I accepted and at the portfolio's allocation meeting I was officially voted in.

I met with the previous SG soon after for my training. The main topics we covered were updating the SRC website, SRC administration (emails, meetings, contacts), constitutional responsibilities and working with Student Governance.

My priority was catching up on emails that had come in during the transition period. I changed the signature on the sr@sun.ac.za mailbox to match the official design as per the SU Brand Identity Manual. During this time, the applications for SU Managers also opened. Having never managed such a large mailbox before, it was initially a slight challenge to keep track of everything, between pending student enquiries, the SRC Managers' applications and the thousands of junk emails in the mailbox.

Next, I got to work on the junk emails. The mailbox would receive up to ten a day, and thousands had accumulated. They came from all kinds of senders – political, religious, e-commerce, technology, beauty, news, everything. I sorted by senders, and one-by-one clicked *unsubscribe* in each sender's email, before deleting all emails from that sender. It took hours. I suspect a student used an online junk-mail subscription bot to sabotage SRC operations in this way, potentially due to a grievance with previous SRC's sending agendas and minutes to all students without the option of unsubscribing. Therefore, SU implemented a policy limiting mass-mailers and requiring them to be approved by the Corporate Communication Division. Our mailbox is clean now, which reduces the risk of missing important emails.

I also revamped the templates for SRC documents (letterhead, term reports) and created an email signature for each SRC member to match the official design as per the SU Brand Identity Manual. Regrettably, this was very time consuming, and needs to be done again following the updating of everyone's email addresses. A guide video would have been a better idea.

SRC Website

The SharePoint web editor is abysmal. It is difficult to navigate and easy to make mistakes. It is also very difficult to find files on the server, so it is important not to delete links unintentionally (the easiest





way is usually to sort by date, which separates current content from that of previous years). First, I uploaded the recent agendas and minutes, as this is constitutionally mandated. Second, I replaced the names and details of previous SRC members with that of the current team. Third, I improved formatting of various pages. Previously, the spacebar was used to separate content into two columns; while this may appear fine on the editor's computer, lines will shift, and the layout will be destroyed on phones or devices with a different resolution.

SRC Meetings

As we are still in a time of the pandemic, lockdown and online learning, all meetings were virtual. Scheduling meetings with the general SRC, the Executive Committee, SRC committees, Student Governance, the Division for Student Affairs and SU Management requires absolute proficiency in Microsoft Teams. Initially, it was a bit intimidating to keep track of meetings and ensure that the right people are invited, that they send in agenda points on time, that the time suits everybody, and that the invitation itself has no mistakes (which would necessitate sending a second invitation and perhaps cause confusion).

The most challenging part, however, were minutes. Previous SG's paid scribes to write up minutes. However, because scribes have little knowledge about the structure or the people within, minutes often contain errors or lack the nuance & detail that an SG can offer. Furthermore, the Executive Committee's sentiment was that SRC members should refrain from diverting work considered as part of their portfolio and incurring additional expenses in the process. This required me to attend every meeting, then listen back to the recording to draw up accurate minutes. It is difficult to strike a balance between thoroughness and conciseness – minutes should be thorough enough to avoid ambiguity and disputes, but concise enough to not take hours to write. It helps to focus on decisions and outcomes (perhaps even highlighting these) and to decide which parts of the discussions contributed thereto.

Throughout meeting admin, it helps to have a good template and a routine.

Budget

The SRC budget was finalised and approved on time. It was decided to include mass-communication emails in my budget, as the communications officer portfolio had merged into mine. Apart from this, the budget is very small, only containing data and discretionary funds. It is worth noting that SRC's money from the institution is only allocated early in February. From October until January, the (limited) funds that the previous SRC left in their costpoint centre can be used. The SRC's budget for 2021 is down a few hundred thousand from last year, but thanks to engagement with Dr Choice Makhetha, we can access our reserve fund and pay for large expense like RegisterAll.

Workstream for Student Services

The WSS is one of the workstreams created by the Institutional Committee for Business Continuity (ICBC). It is chaired by the registrar and includes members from various departments like Bursaries & Loans, the Registrar's Division, Sport, Residence & Admissions etc. Its purpose was to make recommendations to the ICBC and advise on upcoming decisions, based on the inputs of its diverse members. Important topics discussed included the return of students, the academic calendar, concessions for residences & registration, health & safety, and compliance throughout. The agenda always included an opportunity for the SRC's feedback, and I would usually discuss matters from recent SRC meetings or issues several students struggled with. We advised the workstream of issues students encountered during online registration, the large number of defunded NSFAS students who are struggling to find alternative funding, the backlog on student visas (which requires a concession on





access to academic material), etc. Where relevant, I reported back to the SRC Executive Committee on recent WSS recommendations.

Plans for next term.

I am still in the process of updating the Afrikaans version of the SRC website but have encountered technical hurdles. I am engaging with faculties to integrate the SRC in the academic welcoming program and gain exposure amongst newcomers. I believe Student Parliament has now had sufficient time to get up and running, and I plan to build a good working relationship with this structure. I hope to improve my routine and time management to send minutes sooner.

Recommendations to improve portfolio.

Given that the SG and Communications Officer portfolios have merged, and that there is no scribe this time, the workload has become extremely intensive. If the two portfolios remain merged going forward, a scribe should not be considered a luxury but an essential. This will allow the SG to give due attention to other matters, follow up effectively, and address student enquiries attentively.

To my successor, I recommend familiarising yourself with Teams, Outlook, past documents, the website, and other platforms early on. Processes like these, which need to be repeated weekly, need to become second nature. It is also a good idea to homogenise all documents. This helps with filing, record-keeping, retrieval, and gives a professional appearance. When doing something that applies to *all* SRC members (such as creating an email signature), try to make a guide instead – even if the process is short and easy, it will take twenty times longer if it must be done for each member. Make sure any templates or guides you send out are thorough and accurate, otherwise you might need to make a correction twenty times. Focus on streamlining time-intensive activities throughout.

Important Contacts

SU Management

Executive		Executive's Personal Assistant	
Prof Wim de Villiers	wimdv@sun.ac.za vc@sun.ac.za	Wildre Kok	wkok@sun.ac.za
Prof Stan du Plessis	stan@sun.ac.za	Mariette Hanekom	mhanekom@sun.ac.za
Prof Deresh Ramjugernath	dereshr@sun.ac.za	Maretha Joyce	mjoyce@sun.ac.za
Prof Eugene Cloete	eugeneclote@sun.ac.za	Inge-Rae Scholtz	irhode@sun.ac.za
Prof Nico Koopman	nkoopman@sun.ac.za	T Arrison	tarrison@sun.ac.za
Prof Hester Klopper	hklopper@sun.ac.za	H Alexander	halexander@sun.ac.za
Dr Ronel Retief	ronelretief@sun.ac.za	Tarien Jacobs	tarien@sun.ac.za
Dr Choice Makhetha	choicemakhetha@sun.ac.za	Audrey Poole	audreyp@sun.ac.za
Werner Abrahams	wabrahams@sun.ac.za		
Grace Bruinties	graceb@sun.ac.za		

Student governance

Anele Mdepa	Manager	thulani@sun.ac.za
Thulani Hlatswayo	Coordinator	anelemdepa@sun.ac.za





Sharine Dowries	Administrator	sharine@sun.ac.za
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Division for Student Affairs

Dr Choice Makhetha	Senior Director	choicemakhetha@sun.ac.za
Tonia Overmeyer	Dean of Students	toniaovermeyer@sun.ac.za
Gerschwin Fritz	Administrator	gfritz@sun.ac.za

Other Contacts

Gary Howell	Manager: Letting Office	ghowell@sun.ac.za
Nicky Adams	Promotion Officer	nadams@sun.ac.za
J.C. Landman	Communications Coordinator	jclandman@sun.ac.za

