

## Addendum to the Division: Student Affairs Transformation Charter

### Background

The DSAf Transformation Sub-Committee, reports into the DSAf Transformation Forum, and was tasked with drafting a transformation Charter for DSAf in 2019. The sub-committee is constituted by a diverse group of staff (both internal and external to DSAf) and students from the Stellenbosch and Tygerberg campuses.

The DSAf Transformation Charter (the "Charter") is a pledge that signals the type of attitudes and behaviour that is acceptable or unacceptable for DSAf staff and the SU student body. The Charter is aligned with both the DSAf vision and mission<sup>1</sup>, SU Graduate Attributes<sup>2</sup>, Stellenbosch University (SU) values,<sup>3</sup> and the South African Constitution.

### Addendum Objectives:

The purpose of the Addendum is to:

- I. provide definitions of terms that appear in the Charter
- II. provide practical recommendations from the DSAf Transformation Charter Sub-Committee regarding how to implement the Charter

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<sup>1</sup> *DSAf Vision:* Crafting a dynamic journey of learning, growth and transformation

*DSAf Mission:*

- To provide dynamic transformative leadership
- Empower and support Student Affairs Practitioners to achieve excellence in their different areas of work
- Cultivate a welcoming environment conducive for exploration and innovation, giving the students a learning experience that will equip them for the 21st century work life (stretch their minds).
- Creating a transformative experience for students and staff within an environment that is conducive for learning, living and working.

<sup>2</sup> *SU Graduate attributes* include An Enquiring Mind, An Engaged Citizen, A Dynamic Professional, and A Well-rounded Individual.

<sup>3</sup> *SU Values:* Excellence, Compassion, Equity, Respect and Accountability.

## Part 1: Definitions within the Charter

The DSAf Transformation Sub-Committee recommends the following definitions of terms that are featured within the Charter:

### 1. Transformation

Transformation includes all individuals in the spaces in which we work, study and live; regardless of age, race, gender, (dis)abilities, belief system, socio-economic status, pregnancy, the LGBTQIA+ community<sup>4</sup>, marital status, ethnic or social origin, conscience, culture, nationality, language, birth, and other identity markers that may render individuals and communities subject to unfair discrimination. Transformation also involves positive change that ensures all members of society are respected and valued, accepted as equal and are therefore treated equally. Furthermore, transformation is an active process and not simply an outcome.

According to Pattman and Carolissen (2018:338):

“Transformation has the aim of the dissolution of the existing social relations and the institutions, policies, and practices, and creating radically new social arrangements. Of course, the processes of dissolution and creation may be uneven and vary in place, and there may not be uniform rupture or total displacement of old structures, institution, and practices. In a nutshell, while transformation signifies fundamental change, not all change is transformation”

This transformation journey invites the Stellenbosch University community to embody the values of excellence, compassion, equity, respect and accountability. We should also take cognisance that respect means different things to different individuals and groups. It is also important to acknowledge that higher education is a learning space, so others might be unlearning some of their behaviours, thinking and information processing (i.e., a decolonised co-curriculum).

A welcoming environment is one that is free of hostility between different groups, and one in which everyone may enjoy equal and fair opportunities. It is therefore crucial that staff and students participate in interrogating institutional norms and culture. An area of particular concern is that of White, Afrikaans/English

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<sup>4</sup> Includes all non-binary identities and various sexualities

hegemony in general, and White Afrikaans linguistic hegemony in the SU context. Individuals who speak other languages including but not limited to Afrikaans<sup>5</sup>, also need to have their voices heard to ensure inclusivity. It is important also to be aware of assimilation, which drowns out diversity. Furthermore, raising awareness around cyberbullying, cancel culture, and discrimination has become crucial as we have moved learning, work, and development online.

Equitable access to information is crucial as our staff and students hail from different socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds. Giving everyone a fair chance to obtain accurate information when they are considering coming to study or work at SU is vital. When individuals become part of the SU community, they should be able to enjoy an inclusive environment. Universal access is aimed at ensuring accessibility to the broadest range of users, including transforming the physical space to be more inclusive of differently abled individuals. For example, installing elevators and ramps for wheelchairs, access to lactation facilities, and gender-neutral bathrooms. There should also be recognition for complexity within transformative initiatives. For example, queer individuals may not feel comfortable using a single sex bathroom, and some Muslim women as well as some rape survivors would not be comfortable using a gender-neutral bathroom.

In addition, there should be recognition for the fact that most disabilities are not visible, and SU needs to re-think our spaces as visitors, students and staff needing these.

Diversity of representation in leadership should go beyond traditional identities (such as race and gender), because this often excludes people with disabilities, queer individuals, etc. Equal opportunities for training and mentorship at all levels within the workplace, to improve staff potential is key. Furthermore, Transformational leadership is a leadership style that is inclusive, empathic and/or compassionate, people-centred, transparent, enabling, empowering and involves consultative decision-making.

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<sup>5</sup> *Afrikaans* refers to a language created in settler colonial South Africa, developed by the 1500s. It took shape as a language during encounters between indigenous African (Khoi and San), South-East Asian, Dutch, Portuguese and English people (Haupt, 2021)

## 2. Decolonisation

A decolonising university is an institution that takes seriously the demographic representation of South Africa, while also fostering the equality of representation through staff and student led programmes. For change to take place, we need acknowledgement of our past and differences, and we need to try and understand exactly how it affects some people, even if it does not affect some at all. Decolonisation is a term that is often poorly understood, and thus feared. It is used to unpack restorative justice through cultural, psychological, and economic freedom. True decolonisation seeks to challenge and change White superiority<sup>6</sup>, nationalistic history, and truth.

Decolonisation at Stellenbosch University must firstly be born out of a critical engagement and revision of SU's past and its role in privileging forms of information, learning and modes of instruction as part of the oppressive apartheid regime. The physical, social, and epistemological remnants of this murky past must be uncovered and acknowledged explicitly. Furthermore, as post-colonial scholar Achille Mbembe (2019:5) has argued, "decolonising the university starts with the de-privatisation and rehabilitation of the public space."

According to Fataar (2021), "Decolonising education centres cognitive justice based on an expansion and complete overhaul of the western knowledge canon. The call is also for knowledge pluralisation, which refers to incorporation of the complex ways of knowing of subaltern and all previously excluded groups. These calls represent a principled negation of a Western-centric knowledge orientation. Instead, decolonising education is based on the inclusion of all knowledge forms bequeathed to humanity including African, indigenous, Arab-Islamic, Chinese, Hindu, Indo-American, Asiatic, and Western knowledge forms. This all-inclusive approach to knowledge is based on an inter-cultural understanding of multiple and heterodox forms of being human. All knowledge forms have to be brought into play in intercultural education that promotes a type of epistemic openness to the knowledges of all human beings... The university must become a place that

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<sup>6</sup>White superiority or white supremacy is an ideology that white people are superior to other races and should therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups ([https://www.lexico.com/definition/white\\_supremacy](https://www.lexico.com/definition/white_supremacy)). Refer to Manning (2004) for a South African context.

recognises the cultural traditions of all who work and study in it... The call for decolonising education is nothing less than the full incorporation of humanity's knowledge systems into the curriculum and knowledge selection systems of universities and schools. The modalities of such incorporation ought to be the subject of urgent conversation in faculties, department and university support environments, among support workers, lecturers, and the design of learning materials and textbook."

The current SU environment, especially in the time of online learning, does not offer equal access to all students and staff. Many of the formal and informal forms of oppression exist explicitly and implicitly at SU. Therefore, it is the role of all students, staff, and members of the broader SU community to make visible these forms of oppression. Only by doing so can SU begin to work on the development of an inclusive institution, which does not privilege any act or form of knowledge because of who it is associated with. We need to look to the future, away from those frameworks that the formerly "white only" universities constructed and privileged, and away from "teaching obsolete forms of knowledge with obsolete pedagogies" (Mbembe, 2019: 6).

### **3. Equity**

According to Heywood (2008):

Equity means equal distribution of legal and political rights, based on assumption we are all born equal. Equality of opportunity means everyone has the same starting point, or equal life chances, and that talent and capacity for hard work may justify social inequality. Equality of outcome promotes justice and community by seeking an equal distribution of income, wealth and other social goods.

### **4. SU community**

The SU community includes all stakeholders: parents, students, alumni, visitors, both internal and external staff, both permanent and contractor staff. We should also consider individual agency in identifying with a community.

## **5. Staff**

Staff refers to the following categories: Part-time, full-time, consultants, student assistants, and Postdoctoral fellows.

## **6. Our Stakeholders**

Associates of DSAf include interest groups and/or contributors such as the business sector, civil society, government, faculties, alumni, donors, parents and guardians.

## **7. Students**

Students refer to the following categories: students on exchange programmes, full-time, part-time (mostly telematic programmes), special students, studying online, on-campus residence students and commuting students/PSO students.

## **8. Harassment and bullying**

According to Harvey (2019), bullying can be defined as:

"Unwanted conduct in the workplace which is persistent or serious and demeans, humiliates, or creates a hostile or intimidating environment or which is calculated to induce submission by actual or threatened adverse consequences."

According to SU's Unfair Discrimination and Harassment Policy (2016):

Harassment is defined as "unwanted conduct which demeans, humiliates or creates a hostile or intimidating environment or is calculated to induce submission by actual or threatened adverse consequences, and which may be

persistent, once-off or serious and may relate to sex, gender or sexual orientation, or a person's belonging or presumed belonging to a group identified by one or more of the prohibited grounds or characteristics associated with such group."

## **9. Gender-based violence**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or structural violence against individuals of a specific gender. It can be perpetrated by intimate partners, acquaintances, strangers and institutions. Most acts of interpersonal GBV are committed by men against women, and the man perpetrating the violence is often known by the woman, such as a partner or family member. Although men and boys can experience GBV, statistics show that it is mostly directed at women and girls (Darnall & Jewkes, 2013). GBV occurs as a result of normative role expectations and unequal power relationships between genders in a society.<sup>7</sup> GBV also affects the LGBTQIA+ community in adverse ways such as corrective rape.

According to SU's Unfair Discrimination and Harassment Policy<sup>8</sup> (2016):

Sexual harassment refers to: "Behaviour typically experienced as offensive, which may include sexual approaches and which often are made within the context of a relationship of unequal power or authority; sexual harassment is a form of discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation or sexuality; it is unwanted and may be experienced as an expression of power, authority or control of a sexual nature; it creates a hostile environment that prevents those concerned to learn or work to capacity."

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<sup>7</sup> Definition adapted from: <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/gender-based-violence-in-south-africa>

<sup>8</sup> Policy (policy is currently being updated by the Equality Unit to more explicitly include GBV).



## Part 2: Recommendations

The DSAf Transformation Sub-Committee recommends the following approach and practical implementation of the DSAf Transformation Charter:

- The Charter draws on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa to engage our internal stakeholders in a commitment to creating a harmonious space that welcomes and celebrates diversity. The Charter should be used to start a conversation around the exclusionary culture for staff in DSAf and SU, with the intention of acknowledging both past and present injustices, and how they have not been adequately addressed. This involves creating awareness around decolonisation and transformation within DSAf. Hence, the Charter, and subsequent conversations, must include an acknowledgement of the perception of SU as colonial and privileged, which allows for foregrounding for the pledge to take place.
- Collective spaces should be more inclusive in terms of language and faith e.g. there is only one Halaal shop in the Neelsie and Tygerberg Student Centre (TSS) where Muslim students can eat. Signage should also be available in isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans to ensure greater inclusivity. The Charter will be translated into isiXhosa and Afrikaans to ensure parity amongst the three main linguistic groups in the Western Cape province. It will also be converted into Braille and should be made available on the DSAf website to increase accessibility.
- The DSAf Transformation Forum should assist with providing direction in terms of how the Charter is rendered visible, as well as how to implement the pledge presented by this Charter in daily practices. The DSAf Transformation Forum should also provide continuous direction for DSAf and the implementation of transformation as well as decolonisation in practical ways.
- DSAf should give impetus to coordinated institutional efforts to redress and build a society envisioned by the post-apartheid stakeholders. This includes, but is not limited to linguistic parity, art installations, and renaming buildings as well as other spaces in an effort to contribute to visual redress.



- DSAf staff should behave in a collegial and respectful manner towards all stakeholders. This means that exclusionary practices such as failing to greet others, ignoring requests for support, or invisibilising the complexity of students' circumstances when they have queries should cease. Furthermore, a spirit of collaboration should be prevalent amongst all staff towards each other, as well as student leaders. DSAf should recognise that there are students and staff that do not have adequate financial resources that enable them access to technology and data. Support should be offered with this context in mind.
- The Charter should be aligned with the SU Transformation Plan, as well as the staff codes of conduct and Disciplinary Code for Students of SU.
- The Charter should be signed by all DSAf staff and student leadership at SU during their induction.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the Charter:
  - The Charter should be part of the Welcome pack for newcomers (new students)
  - The Charter should feature in the induction of new staff
  - The Charter should be revisited and, if necessary, revised every five years
  - The Charter Sub-Committee recommends that it be linked to the annual plans for each centre within DSAf
  - The Charter Sub-Committee and DSAf Transformation Committee should discuss the option of having the Charter signed. In the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Charter there was no signing, but wide distribution and a launch of the Charter instead
  - Feedback on the implementation of the Charter should be discussed at the annual DSAf Transformation Summit
  - The DSAf Transformation Committee should consider and discuss who will be responsible for the implementation of the Charter. How will student leaders be involved?

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