

Greetings to the Chancellor Dr Judy Dlamini-Nxasana

Greetings to the Vice Chancellor Professor Adam Habib

Greetings to the Programme Director, the current Dean of Students Mr Jerome September

Greetings to all the Registrar, Academic Staff and University Management

Greetings to all the workers of this institution, our mothers and fathers in the revolution for the liberation of our people.

Greetings to all the student leadership structures present here, from my SRC (which you'll get to meet in a moment), the various school councils, leadership of clubs and societies that we have on campus, the All Residence Council and the Various House Committees.

Greetings to the mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers, and any family friends and relatives that have come here today to witness the first day of a new chapter of their loved ones life. A scary chapter yes, because you feel like you're letting your little one venture out into the big bad world all on their own, BUT it is a chapter that promises to be, despite a bit of turbulence here and there (because such is life), is one that should ultimately result in prosperity. I say should, because we unfortunately do not live in a utopia and this place comes with a lot of challenges, of which I will unpack a bit later.

And last but not least, greetings to all the beautiful first year students that are seated before me, today. Ngesixhosa sithi ngu "singaye". Which loosely translated would mean, the reason we are all gathered here today. You are the reason why we are all here today, you are the one who has done your family proud by successfully completing 12 years of schooling, you are the one who survived the baptism that was prelims and finals, you are the one that has not only been successfully enrolled in an institution of higher learning but has been admitted to the best one on the African continent. Do you guys know how special you are? Hee, I don't think you understand. Out of 84 000 applications submitted to this University, only 5 200 first years were accepted and enrolled. Let me repeat that for you. Out of 84 000 applications to study at Verts, only 5 200 of you were accepted and enrolled. Can we give our matriculants a round of applause?

So when we call you the *crème de la crème*, the best of the best, we mean it. Despite those ones there in my hometown, down south by the mountains and the beach constantly trying to prove that they're on our level, World Rankings have year in and year out statistically proven that we are number one not only in the country, but on this continent. So ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, and all non-conforming gender bodies in first year, I welcome you to this space. A space that is challenging, a space that is transformative, a space that is constantly robust with engagement, a space of learning in and outside the classroom (this can be done by joining a club and society such as BMF and ABSIP to help you grow your network, debating, signing up for sports, availing yourself for leadership). It is a space that seeks to grow you beyond the academic front, a space of not only self discovery but the pursuit of a better life. So that after conquering the Wits Edge we can then go back and

better the lives of our families and those we left behind. We thank you for choosing to join our Wits community, no matter how pleasant/problematic it may be.

For those of you who do not know me, I am Sisanda Aluta Mbolekwa. I am the daughter of a trade unionist my primary school teacher. I am a sibling to two sisters and a not so little brother. I am a former Gender and Transformation officer in the SASCO BEC, I am a former secretary of the School of Literature, Language and Media Studies student council, I am a former secretary of the Wits Student Forum, I am a former Media and Publicity officer and the SASCO Greater Johannesburg Region, I am also former Vice-Chairperson of house committee at Sunnyside Residence. I recently qualified in a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Media and Political Studies, graduating in March, and a current Honours student in the school of Journalism.

I also happen to be Madame President of the Wits SRC for the term 2018/2019. This moment is so sentimental for me, and should be too – for other black women out there. What you must understand is that black woman have had to develop a larger vision for our society than perhaps any other group. They have had to understand white men, white women, black men and they have had to understand themselves as black women. When black women win, it is victory for virtually every segment of society.

The reason why I say this moment is sentimental, is that back when I was in first year, seated right where you are – The Wits SRC President that stood before me addressing at the Welcome day of 2016, was a phenomenal black woman by the name of Nompandolo Mkhathshwa. I think you guys were a bit too young to remember but she was one of the leaders at the helm of the revolution that was #FeesMustFall, a revolution that saw the mass mobilisation of students not only here at Wits, but across the country who put their lives on the line to bring us the realisation of Free Education in our lifetime.

I remember her saying very explicitly, that the revolution does not have a face attached to it, and that the baton should be taken up by the generation that was to follow. I also remember her saying the next Wits SRC President was seated somewhere in the crowd, not once did I think that it would be me. What also makes this moment ultra special, is that Wits University now has a black female Chancellor by the name of Dr Judy Dlamini-Nxasana. So my point is to get us to acknowledge and welcome the progressive advances at this institution in terms of transformation. Apart from the SRC President being a black woman, and the Chancellor being a black woman, majority if not all Registrars that preside over the different Faculties are women. So clearly, we slowly but surely are doing away with the hegemony that patriarchy holds over the rest of us in society.

Representation is for me is very important, in fact it is a basic tenet that we should all uphold if we are serious in our vision of the creation of a non-discriminatory, non-racist, non-sexist and all-inclusive society. Maqabane, this thing is very simple. If you look like me, speak like me, behave like me, If I can relate to you – there is a better chance of you not only understanding my socio-economic conditions make up this individual that stands before you, but there is a better chance that I can relate to you and in turn, best represent your interests because your struggle is mine and mine is yours. So without representation of

all genders, races, sexes, sexualities, and bodies it means that there are stories that are overlooked. There are stories that are invisible. There are stories that are missing. Excuse the journalist in me.

But the basic tenet is that we are tired of marginalized bodies feeling as though they aren't seen or heard. So as the number one institution on the African continent, I am going to need all the members of the Wits University to work together on this one. When you call yourself a Witsie, there is a certain expectation of your conduct and attitude in this space. We are not going to tolerate gender based violence, misogyny, patriarchy, sexism, racism and bigotry in this institution. Here, we are breeding young people who are going to become game-changers, innovators and progressive leaders of society! So please, if you are problematic, if you are disrespectful or intolerant, racist, sexist, mysoginist, violent, if you dare lay your hands on or take advantage of a woman – I am going to find you and I WILL chuck you out myself.

Introduction of SRC Members

Now, I stand before you as one but I do not come alone. As the generation of student activists that makeup this year's Wits Students Representative Council, we are in the business of making your voices, opinions and perspectives "present", in this University's policy and decision making processes. We are here to speak, advocate for, symbolize and act on behalf of the 38 000 students that make up our constituency.

1. Deputy President - Nkateko Muloiwa
 - Bachelor of Arts (Political Studies and International Relations) graduate
 - Honours in Development Studies

2. Secretary – Ashley Nyiko Mabasa
 - Bachelor of Arts Industrial Sociology and Political Studies
 - Honours in Labour Economics and Sociology
 - Currently studying Masters in Labour and Economic Sociology

3. Deputy Secretary – Thaakirah Savahl
 - Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Psychology and Political Studies Triple Major graduate
 - Currently studying Honours in Political Studies

4. Treasurer – Keneuwe Setai
 - Final year in Bachelor of Education

5. Academic Officer – Palesa Mofokeng
 - Honours in Bachelor of Education

6. Legal, Policy and Constitutional officer – Faatima Laher
 - Third year BA law, majoring in Media Studies

7. Clubs, Societies and Student Governance – Nkosinathi Makhanya
 - Third year Bachelor of Education
8. All-Faculty Chairperson - Thato Sakong
 - Final year in Bachelor of Education
9. Campus Wellness and Advisory officer – Katlego Sera
 - Bachelor of Arts majoring in International Relations and Anthropology
 - Honours in Anthropology
 - Currently pursuing a Masters in Anthropology
10. Projects, Media and Campaigns – Gugu Zwane
 - Final year Bachelor of Education
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11. Fundraising officer – Solomzi Moleketi
 - Third year Bachelor of Fine Art, Economics and International Relations
12. Undergraduate sports representative – Sasha Nzvatu
 - Second Year Bachelor of Accounting Sciences
13. Postgraduate sports representative – Tanita Ramburuth Hurt
 - Bachelor of Science majoring in Physics, Astrophysics and Computational Sciences
 - Honours in Physics
 - Currently studying Masters of Science in Astrophysics
14. SRC Support Officer – Tshenolo Leshika
 - Fourth year Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery
15. All Residence Council Chairperson – Sibusiso Ngcobo
 - Bachelor of Science in Chemistry graduate
 - Third year Chemical Engineering student
16. Postgraduate Chairperson – Keabetswe Khutsoane
17. Last but not least, in absentia: Gender and Transformation officer – Sibongile Sibeko
 - BA Law and Psychology graduate
 - Currently pursuing her LLB degree

Witsies, standing in front of you are your duly elected Student Representatives for the year of 2019. Standing before you is your first line of defence at this institution. No student should go hungry or homeless under our watch. No student will be victimized or discriminated against. We are here because Students Remain Central!
UYAWABONA AMAJONI

The nature of student leadership sometimes deprives us of our youth and the ability to keep up with the relevant trends. So part of us trying to keep up with our constituency and to get you familiarized with your student leaders, we are going to launch a #SpotYourSRC competition. All you have to do is, during the course of this week, once you identify an SRC member on campus, you take a selfie with them and post it on social media with the hashtag #SpotYourSRC. Our Social Media handles are @Wits_SRC on twitter, @Wits_SRC on Instagram and Wits SRC on facebook. Give us a like, follow, share, retweet, whatever it is that young people call it these days! The more SRC members you spot and recognize, the better your chances of winning. The prize up for grabs is one of 10 book vouchers and a ticket to the Freshers bash.

When we entered office on the 1st of November 2018, we knew that we had a great task at hand. As student leaders we often inherit issues from the past and are tasked with the realization of our own generational mission.

Institutional Issues

1. Workers

For many of us, the university is not just our study space, it's also a mirror image of the communities we come from. We have our parents here, in their respective capacities as the university workforce. They are here to work tirelessly to secure a better future for us, yet they remain shackled by outsourcing, low wages and poor working conditions. They continue to be marginalized by the university through its systematic capital-oriented outlook. It's therefore paramount that our solidarity be nurtured through our daily campus activities and interactions, whether it be at the dining hall staff, at res with the staff that do room cleaning, the bus driver, etc). Campus workers and students are all affected by the chronic, exclusionary nature of universities. As the Wits SRC we remain resolute in the protection of workers and their rights, and continue to work with NEHAWU to ensure that no worker on this campus is exploited in our term of office. The university must know we're here to change our circumstances and those of our parents. Forward with worker-student solidarity forward!

2. Mental health

Outside of the academic pressures that come with being a student, students are also exposed to several other pressures associated with financial constraints, social pressures, family pressure, rape and sexual violence, crime and general anxiety that comes with being away from home. Because of this, mental health is a huge challenge for many students, and can lead to many devastating consequences such as decreased academic performance, lack of social interaction, psychological changes and even death or suicide. It also happens that you travel thousands of kilometres only to feel excluded in this space, or to feel like you don't belong. The reality is that

we are Africans who don't feel like they are living in Africa. It is of paramount importance that all students remember that the SRC is their main support system for any issues that they face. When we say we are the first line of defence for students, we mean it. Furthermore, the CCDU, Campus Health and Emthonjeni Center are available for use. No student should suffer in silence. We are here for you.

3. Accommodation

Firstly, I would like to apologise for the disaster that happened at Flower Hall yesterday. The students and parents that were there yesterday can attest that their first encounter with this university was far from pleasant. Student leaders are constantly trying to fight against centralisation of a system, we have seen with the administration of NSFAS that it simply does not work. We hope that management has seen that the centralisation of the residence registration does not assist and will go back to the old way of doing things.

The struggle for affordable accommodation is ongoing against renter-capitalists who seek to turn universities into profit-making machinery. Student accommodation not only needs to be affordable, but there needs to be more accommodation available. It cannot be that a student is denied University accommodation on the basis that they cannot afford it; this further restricts access to education because students from townships and rural areas of Khayelitsha, Cofimvaba, Empangeni and Lebowakgomo are unable to come into the University to pursue a degree based on the fact that they will not have a roof over their heads. We are tired of having to perform our poverty year in and year out. Just the other day we had to fight with an off campus accommodation service provider who was demanding upfront fee payments from students on NSFAS. I mean really. I am on NSFAS because I am financially disadvantaged, where must I get the R4000 from? In January of all months? So, the University, Government and student leaders need to work together to ensure that students have access to adequate, affordable and safe accommodation. As Wits SRC we are saying, 1 STUDENT 1 BED!

4. Funding

'The doors of learning shall be open to all' is one of the key tenets of the Freedom Charter, which is one of the documents that laid the foundation for the freedom and democracy which we enjoy in this country today. Unfortunately, higher education has become commodified in this country, thus barring young talented black children from accessing what should be a basic human right. As the SRC, we are committed to the fight for access to free, quality and decolonized education, which ultimately means breaking down all financial barriers to education. No student should be financially excluded at Wits; if we claim to be the best University in Africa. Instead, we should ensure that young, bright African minds are able to graduate from the University, despite their financial circumstances.

When the new NSFAS model in the form of free education was introduced December 2017, it created access in the institutions of higher learning for the poor, working class. We acknowledge the step taken by government in responding to the call raised by the generation of FMF and to an extent we commend the state for this progressive move. However the tone of our praise is limited because the government step in responding to FMF is not what we anticipated. This education will not be free until it answers the question of the missing middle. This education will not be free until those who took part in the student victimization are made accountable for their actions. This education will not be free until the decriminalization of student protests is realized. This education will not be free until all charges against student activists who put their lives on their line fighting for access, are dropped. As Wits SRC we saying, Free Khanya Cekeshe, Free Masixole Mlandu, Free Mcebo Dlamini.

As we welcome the new NSFAS model, we must also note the administrative challenges that accompany it. Those who are deemed too rich for NSFAS yet too poor to afford their fees, are known as the missing middle and left out by the system. This is why the WITS SRC, together with council, managed to rally up R10 million rand, towards the establishment of an SRC Hardship fund. This fund, focuses primarily towards responding to the genuine hardships faced by students. One of these is, the issue of historical debt. We negotiated with university management to create concessions that would allow students with outstanding debt a chance to register for the following academic year, provided that they attempted to pay 50% of their outstanding debt and signed an AOD. Now for students who did not have the required amount, the Hardship fund then covered them. Out of just under 1000 applicants, we have managed to assist 87% of those students and they are now registered for the 2019 academic year.

Our only issue now as the SRC is the case of students with historical debt and are unable to graduate because they are owing fees. It is unfortunate that the system has turned student leaders into fundraising machines. Instead of problematizing institutional issues, fighting for decolonization of our curriculum and championing the transformation of our universities, we occupy ourselves with raising funds for students. Its becomes hard because we understand very well that donor fatigue has kicked in. That is because we have, year in and year out – been using temporary solutions to solve a permanent problem. As unfortunate as it is, we are saying that we are going to go back to the drawing board and devise policies that will alleviate students' financial burdens. In the meantime, as the WITS SRC of 2018/2019, we are saying, assist us to launch our Save-A-Degree campaign. As the WITS SRC we are saying, Its very simple this thing. Allow me to graduate so I can access employment and be part of the working class, so that I can earn money and be able to then negotiate a payment plan from my salary, allow me to graduate so that I can go back and better the living conditions of my family. Withholding my graduation does not assist anyone.

To kickstart this campaign, we must remember that charity begins at home. With my visionary foresight I can foresee Professor Adam Habib reaching out for his cheque book, and making a generous donation of no less than half a million. Surely the VC of VCs wants to see his students graduate! My foresight shifts to the DVCs, Prof Zebulon and Prof Crouch I see you, my ancestors tell me that you are going to pledge atleast R300 000 each towards saving degrees! To the Deans, come on nana you don't wanna miss this! Prof Veller, Imraan,

Ebrahim, can we see those R200 000 contributions? The registrars of this university are forces of the student movement, and we believe in their leadership as progressive women who are going to pledge atleast R200 000. Lecturers of this university through the leadership of ASAWU are we going to see a donation from your side, forces? Just wampomfive per lecturer. To our mothers and fathers, the general staff of Wits, NEHAWU our people, we understand that you do not have the wealthiest of pockets, but if each worker contributes just R50 and we have 5000 workers, we can raise up to R250 000.

To our mother, Dr Judy Dlamini Nxasana, an entire medical doctor by profession and business woman of note. Wena mama we know that you selflessly carry the burdens of students on your shoulders nje ngomntu ongu mama, therefore you will weigh in and help us reach our target of R2 million rand by the end of February.

To the mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, I know you have spent so much already in terms of getting your little one ready and off to university. But I am pleading with you to assist us. There are comrades in the crowd who will give out pledge cards with banking details, asking you to make a donation of atleast R100 towards saving a degree. For those cousins and friends of first years that are here, we have a jar that will be circulating around campus, asking you to help Save-A-Degree, please drop any spare change or unused notes in your wallet. Lets make it rain for Witsies!

To corporates and business owners and entrepreneurs out there, help us save these degrees. These are the very same people who you are going to employ so that they can grow your business, invest in our brothers and sisters. To civil society out there, we know you are watching. Assist us. We will be launching an SMS line, where you can sms Save-A-Degree and each sms will cost you R10. Please keep up with our social media pages for updates on this. Help us Save A Degree!

BANDANAS

First years, you are now officially Witsies. You now not only carry the responsibility to liberate your family, but you are to also become a leader of society. You are your ancestors wildest dreams, and you will carry yourself as such. In my closing words to you, freshman and freshers, Witsies at large, I will quote my favourite black professional tennis player, Serena Williams:

She argues that luck has nothing to do with success. Instead, she attributes it to getting up when you lose, and making it better by trying again.

From today, you are all part of the Wits community. As citizens, its time we challenged the system, its time we stopped looking to management for solutions, its time we fought for what is ours! From today it doesn't matter what your background is or where you come from, because your circumstances do not define you! What matters are your dreams and goals. Black child, it is possible

Ndithi kuni, enkosi. Ndiyabulela. Ngiyabonga. Kea leboga. Baie Dankie. I thank you.

AMANDLA. MALIBONGWE