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2 April 2025

UCT's award-winning student leader and aspirant neuroscientist opens doors for fellow students



Blessing Gumbu

Photo: Supplied

Blessing Gumbu – winner of the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Student Leader Award who graduates with a [BSc in Human Anatomy and Physiology](#), and Biochemistry on Wednesday, 2 April 2025 – believes that leadership is about serving, inclusivity, bringing about change and being a voice for others, especially those unable to speak out themselves.

He has achieved this feat by advocating for the inclusion of all interested students in the [UCT Surgical Society](#) whose membership was previously limited to Health Sciences students only. With his influence the society started recruiting on UCT's upper campus in 2023. The society enables students to shadow surgeons from first year.

A would-be medical student since high school with a passion for the human brain and a goal of becoming a neuroscientist and neurosurgeon, Gumbu says: "I loved my science degree, but like many others, it was not my first choice. My passions were health related, and I was aware there were other students who'd actively chosen to study science, who were also interested in Health Sciences societies."

By his third year at UCT, Gumbu had become the secretary general of the UCT Surgical Society, events collaborations coordinator of the Cortex (Neuroscience) Club, and subcommittee head for the Students' Health and Welfare Centre's Organisation's (SHAWCO) Tuesday clinics and driving to open doors for those who would love to be members.

When his name was announced as a Student Leader Award winner at UCT's Hasso Plattner School of Design Thinking Afrika (d-school Afrika), he thought he'd misheard. It took a second calling and the cheers of his team to register it was his name being called. UCT luminaries and students had gathered to celebrate individual students and student teams for their leadership contribution in terms of community, social justice, health and media. "I thought it can't be me. No way. I am just Blessing," he said.

"Through my involvement as the secretary of the Surgical Society, I have managed to recruit science students and students from other faculties interested in surgery to join the club," he wrote in his motivational letter for the award. "I was in denial at first, but then I went back and reread my motivation letter and I thought: 'Actually, I deserve it'."

His involvement in society leadership roles at UCT has been an incredible journey filled with growth, learning and engagement with students and different leadership structures. It helps balance one's routine, meet inspirational people – he has met Nobel-winning scientists and legendary doctors – make connections and, most importantly, bring change, help others and make sure everyone's voice is heard. It also provides a social life, time to relax and flex one's creative abilities.

For most top learners, it can feel like failure when they don't get accepted to study their chosen professional discipline. "My advice is don't feel like it's the end of the world. If, like me, you get accepted into a BSc instead of medicine, don't look at it as a setback, but take the opportunity to consider if you really want to be a doctor. As you progress, you may decide you don't want to see patients but prefer research."

Muguru is still focused on his long-term goal. "What's the dream? It's to be a well-known neuroscientist and neurosurgeon." He has his sights set on the University of the Witwatersrand's Graduate Entry Medical Programme (GEMP), which allows suitably qualified applicants to enter the third year of an MBChB degree.

Muguru's journey started at Molelwane Secondary School in Mahikeng, where he was determined to put the school on the map with his matric result which garnered two awards: Top Performing Learner in Quartile 3 Schools and Top 10 Learner in the Ngaka Modiri Molema district.

His principal sponsored his bus trip to Cape Town and arranged for a friend, Kefithile Mpolokeng, to collect the young Muguru from the station and drive him to UCT, his dream university, where he started out, far from home and knowing no-one.

"Being here was a big wow! It really is the best university in Africa."

Muguru believes in *Mhunhu munhu ne vangwe vanhu*. This Shona proverb translates to people need each other.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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