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## **UCT's excellence shines as two graduates named 2026 Rhodes Scholars**



Sangweni.

Thobani  
Photo: Supplied

Excellence and leadership have once again placed the University of Cape Town (UCT) on the global stage, as graduates Thobani Sangweni and Raphael De Sousa are named among the recipients of the 2026 Rhodes Scholarships to study at the University of Oxford.

The Rhodes Scholarship is the world's oldest and most celebrated international scholarship programme, offering exceptional young leaders from around the world a fully funded opportunity to study at Oxford. Each year, just ten scholarships are awarded across Southern Africa after a highly competitive selection process that tests academic excellence, leadership potential and a commitment to serving others.

Both recipients are passionate about advancing science and education on the African continent.

Sangweni, whose academic interests lie in experimental particle physics, said the award represents years of perseverance and the belief that science can inspire and empower others. "This opportunity reinforces my dedication to using science not just to expand human knowledge, but to motivate others from similar backgrounds to dream boldly and persevere in the face of adversity."

De Sousa, co-founder of Delta Education, a free offline learning platform supporting high school learners in mathematics and physical sciences, said: "The Rhodes Scholarship allows me to pursue a PhD in theoretical physics while expanding Delta Education to reach every grade, subject, and South African language. I hope to inspire the next generation of physicists and make quality education accessible to all."

Regional Manager for Rhodes Scholarships for Southern Africa, Beverley Johnson, said the 2025 selection process was particularly competitive. "We continue to be inspired by the calibre of applicants from across the region. Choosing just 10 scholars is never easy, but Thobani and Raphael stood out for their intellect, drive and clear commitment to uplifting others."

Over 57 candidates were shortlisted in 2025, with 22 finalists advancing to the national round of interviews held in Johannesburg from 7 to 9 November 2025. A diverse panel made the final selections of experts and leaders.

Ndumiso Luthuli, National Secretary for the Rhodes Scholarships for Southern Africa, said: "The Rhodes selection process seeks young people who combine academic excellence with courage, compassion and a clear sense of purpose. Thobani and Raphael personify these qualities."

Globally, more than 100 Rhodes Scholarships have been awarded this year to graduates from leading universities across the world. The 2026 cohort will join a community of scholars who share a lifelong commitment to tackling humanity's greatest challenges.

Sir Rick Trainor, interim Warden and Chief Executive Officer of the Rhodes Trust, added: "We are delighted to welcome the 2026 Class of Rhodes Scholars Elect. They represent cultures and perspectives from every corner of the world, and we look forward to seeing their contributions to Oxford and to society."

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

### **MEET THE UCT RHODES SCHOLARS-ELECT FOR 2026**

Short bios of the two UCT Rhodes scholars-elect.

**Nkosinathi Thobani Sangweni (23)**

Nkosinathi hails from a small village in Ulundi, Kwa-Zulu Natal, called Ntendeka. He graduated from UCT with a BSc in Physics and Astrophysics in 2022 and a BSc Honours in Physics in 2023. He is currently completing an MSc in Physics at UCT.

Thobani's research is conducted within the ATLAS experiment at CERN and focuses on a search for  $t\bar{t}WZ$  production, which contributes to understanding rare Standard Model processes. In addition to his research, he serves as a physics tutor and lab demonstrator for first- and second-year undergraduate students.

Thobani is an avid football player and is learning to play the electric guitar in his spare time. He is a big Formula 1 fan and an Anime and Manga enthusiast.

Thobani hopes to pursue a DPhil in Particle Physics at Oxford University in 2026.

**Raphael De Sousa (22)**

Raphael graduated from UCT in March 2025 with a triple major in Mathematics, Physics and Applied Mathematics, and is currently completing a BSc (Honours) in Physics at UCT.

Raphael's academic interests lie in theoretical and mathematical physics. He is particularly fascinated by quantum field theory – the mathematical framework underpinning the Standard Model of particle physics, one of the most successful theories in modern science. During his third year, he collaborated on research in soliton theory and co-published the paper "The energy–frequency diagram of the (1+1)-dimensional  $\Phi^4$  oscillon" in the *Journal of High Energy Physics*.

He is also an incoming Allan Gray Fellow, driven by a passion for entrepreneurship and the use of technology to address social challenges – currently with a focus on education. In his free time, Raphael enjoys hiking and running.

At Oxford, Raphael hopes to pursue an MSc in Mathematical and Theoretical Physics, where he will delve into the mysteries of quantum field theory and the search for physics beyond the Standard Model, with the long-term goal of lecturing in Africa and inspiring the next generation of physicists.

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