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UCT takes top honours in South Africa's inaugural Effie College Challenge



Keorapetse Mokoena and Kimae Rubbie of UCT's award-winning Stargazers team.

Photo: Supplied

The University of Cape Town (UCT) has emerged as the standout performer in South Africa's first-ever Effie College Challenge, securing both first and second place in a competition designed to test and recognise students' ability to work with real-world briefs.

The initiative drew student teams from four institutions – UCT, University of Johannesburg (UJ), North-West University (NWU) and the AAA School of Advertising (AAA).

Through a rigorous judging process – spanning 13 October to 4 November – a distinguished panel of industry judges identified the Top 6 finalists, with the Top 3 emerging as standout teams for their strategic insight, creativity and results-driven thinking. Their final presentations took place on 14 November, after which the order of winners was agreed in a robust judging discussion.

The inaugural honours were conferred as follows: first place went to Stargazers (UCT) – a team of Keorapetse Mokoena and Kimae Rubbie; Brand Minds (UCT) earned second; and AdVengers (UJ) finished third. Rounding off the Top 6 for 2025 were Elevation Strategists (NWU), Strategic Six (NWU) and Momentum Makers (NWU).

Mokoena said: “Winning Effie College South Africa was more than an award – it was a statement. It affirmed my way of thinking, my approach to strategy, and my ability to turn insight into work that moves people and brands.

“The experience stretched me, challenged me under pressure, and reinforced that strategy and creativity are inseparable when the goal is true impact. It sharpened my perspective and reminded me why we play to win in this industry. It didn’t just boost my confidence – it ignited a fire to keep creating, keep leading and keep raising the bar. I’m proud of what I’ve achieved, but I’m even more excited for what comes next, because this is only the beginning.”

Rubbie: “Being awarded first place in the inaugural Effie College Challenge South Africa is a milestone we are extremely proud of. Competing on a live Nedbank brief and being evaluated by industry leaders pushed us to think critically, collaborate strongly and deliver real marketing effectiveness. It’s an honour to bring this win to UCT.”

UCT Head of Marketing Studies, Associate Professor James Lappeman, expressed immense pride in the students’ achievement, noting that they excelled despite the demanding timing of exam preparation and final assignments. He added that winning an award of this calibre, accompanied by such strong praise from the judges, stands as a remarkable testament to both teams.

“The concept behind Effie College is to teach the discipline of effectiveness in marketing,” said Gillian Rightford, Executive Director for Effie South Africa at the Association for Communication and Advertising. “This first year has shown how quickly students can apply Effie’s principles – from defining the problem and framing sharp objectives, to linking strategy and creative solutions with clear measures. It’s a promising sign for the future of the profession.”

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