



Date: 11th of March 2015

Dear Student

The UCT SRC has noted the media reports about a student who protested against the Cecil John Rhodes statue on Monday the 9th of March. What on the surface looked like a shirtless, black man in running tights, a pink helmet and a placard written "Stop White Arrogance" is yet another consequence of an institutional culture that is largely exclusionary in an age where the student body is diverse in terms of race, gender, sexuality and disability.

Contrary to what has been reported in the media, the SRC nor any SRC members were involved in organising the protest. Furthermore, no SRC members threw any substance at the Rhodes statue.

People joined the protest at various times of the day because they were united around the call for the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue. Transformation should be felt in all aspects of the university, from the curriculum, to the diversity of students and staff and to the symbolism it reflects. The SRC at its meeting held on Tuesday 10th of March endorsed the call to have the Cecil John Rhodes removed. The decision to remove the statue was unanimous.

For too long the narrative at this university has silenced the voices of black (coloured, indian, african) students and black history. This university continues to celebrate, in its institutional symbolism, figures in South African history, who are undisputedly white supremacists. Rhodes has been praised for donating this land to the university, building the South African economy and bringing "civilization" to this country. But for the majority of South Africans this is a false narrative, how can a colonizer donate land that was never his land in the first place? Rhodes introduced the first racial policies of this country known as the Grey Act which allowed for black people to be utilized as cheap exploited labour in the mines owned by him. Rhodes' ideology of bringing "civilisation" to Africa also had undertones of heteronormativity and started instilling the gender binary we see in our society. The statue is a constant reminder for many black students of the position in society that black people have occupied due to hundreds of years of apartheid, racism, oppression and colonialism.

The SRC has highlighted, in its statement on the alleged racial attacks, that the university has not done much to create an inclusive curriculum and environment nor has the university redefined its institutional symbolism of the former colonial narrative depicting African people as inferior, sub-human, frightening and intolerant human beings. It has now been largely accepted that Africa has a history of its own prior to slavery and colonization, however this remains largely unknown by students in South African universities and that is precisely the problem that we are facing in terms of transformation. As an institution of higher learning, UCT must play a leading role in spreading true knowledge about pre-colonial Africa and through this; create a culture that is representative of the diversity of students on campus.





What is curious to note, is how the discussion on social media surrounding the issue seems to centre on whether or not this form of expression was appropriate rather than an analysis of the intention and symbolism behind such a scene. At the end of the day, the student managed to spark debate around issues of transformation. What we aim to do is to conscientise students not only in terms of race but also gender, sexuality, disability and other invisible ways in which heteronormative oppression functions every day within this institution.

We support the workers of this university. These workers, for some of us, are our parents, uncles, and aunts, and we know the realities that they face at this institution. We were presented with many images of the after effects of the protest, where outsourced black cleaners had to come and clean up the mess left behind and for the first time some students gave a thought about the workers and their positions at this institution. The fact that UCT Management hired outsourced workers to come and clean up the protest shows the plight that workers face at this university daily. It also highlights the position of black workers and the way in which they are treated at this university. The very workers who feel the racism at this university, are called to clean it up and are once again reminded of their position at the university. A tradition like sixes by sevens in which students drink copious amounts of alcohol and vomit on each other, never mind the wild parties thrown at residences, all require workers to clean up the vomit and mess of the very privileged students of this university. The workers continue to remain invisible at the university, even around issues that deeply affect them.

Transformation month is the first deliberate attempt in trying to empower students to stand with us in tackling transformation from a holistic perspective. The idea behind this month is to create a unified student body that we can mobilize to push the transformation agenda institutionally.

We encourage student to participate in the various transformation month activities organized by the SRC, you can get more information by following: "Transform UCT" on Facebook. Furthermore, the SRC in conjunction with the Office of the Vice Chancellor Professor Crain Soudien will be hosting a seminar called "Discussion heritage, signage and symbolism" on the 16th of March 2015 in Kramer, Lecture Theatre 2 from 16h00.

The SRC in its meeting held yesterday evening had resolved to call a mass meeting on Thursday during meridian, we were subsequently informed that there is a student who has taken it upon himself to organize such as initiative and thus decided to support his efforts. All students are invited to a mass meeting taking place:

Date: 12th of March
Time: 13h00
Venue: Jammie Plaza





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The SRC will be continuing consulting students on transformation issues within the institution and the SRC's position on the Rhodes statue throughout the month of March. Should you have any queries and/or comments please email us on: src@uct.ac.za

Sincerely

Ramabina Mahapa
SRC President

