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UCT's Rhodes scholars want to use opportunity to change South Africans' lives for the better

Four young bright minds from the University of Cape Town (UCT) have been granted the esteemed Rhodes Scholarship to pursue their careers at the renowned Oxford University in 2016.

The four UCT graduates – Kgaugelo Sebidi, Diederick Ferrandi, Mary Jiyani and Sakhe Mkosi – will be pursuing careers in Civil Law, Economics, and Development Studies.

Sebidi, a Development Studies graduate, faced impossible odds to pursue his first love - psychology. In the process he discovered an even greater passion for development studies and as a Rhodes scholar he will pursue an MPhil in Development Studies at Oxford University. "My biggest achievement would be to come back and share the knowledge and expertise I acquired so as to further the socioeconomic agenda in South Africa and Africa," says Sebidi.

A supporter of the Rhodes Must Fall Movement (RMF), Sebidi says he does not feel any ambiguity in accepting this scholarship. He believes RMF and the Rhodes Scholarships both seek transformation. "The Rhodes Scholarship seeks transformation through investing in young individuals who have the instincts to lead and also possess the potential to contribute greatly to society. RMF on the other hand, seeks transformation through being critical of the status quo in matters of higher education and coloniality. We need to appreciate that both entities are good for humanity and thus they can coexist because transformation is at the core of both their aspirations," he says.

Economist Ferrandi looks forward to emerging from the experience a better person and better able to grapple with the problems facing South Africans. He views Oxford University as a personal challenge.

"It is a challenging place, and I'm sure at times it will feel like a very harsh and demanding environment. I hope to learn from this experience and return to South Africa a better person for it – as opposed to simply being a better thinker or having better skills." He plans to study towards an MPhil in economics. He regards the scholarship as a responsibility, as creating an obligation to serve South Africans humbly, especially those most in need. "I hope that this is enough to justify the opportunity, and I hope I'm able to live up to this lofty goal," he says.

Law graduate Jiyani became the first female Malawian recipient of a Rhodes Scholarship. She was also awarded the Mandela Rhodes Scholarship, which she will use to pursue a master's in Private Law and Human Rights at UCT in 2016. Among her many achievements is winning the Ionnan Scholarship for Criminal Justice, an International Bar Association bursary and a class medal. She has also made the dean's merit list in every year of her undergraduate studies. She plans to study towards a Bachelor in Civil Law at Oxford University.

"The scholarship programme emphasises social responsibility. Recipients are urged to 'fight the world's fight' and indeed many Rhodes scholars, such as Bram Fischer and Edwin Cameron, have gone on to lead lives that have had a great positive impact on their societies. This is what newly elected Rhodes scholars should aspire to do too," she says.

Mkosi, a product of the Faculty of Commerce's successful Education Development Unit (EDU), aims to use this opportunity as a platform for further activism to promote decolonisation and transformation at Oxford. He obtained his BCom degree with distinctions in financial reporting, management accounting, taxation and corporate governance and achieved a grade point average of 86%. He pocketed seven class medals and was on the dean's merit list each year from 2011 to 2013. He went on to complete a Post Graduate Diploma in Accounting, with a distinction in financial reporting.

Mkosi says he feels an ethical tension in accepting a Rhodes Scholarship. "Once I am at Rhodes House [in Oxford] I will get involved in initiatives such as Redress Rhodes, which seek to address the remnants of [Rhodes'] sordid colonial history, particularly insofar as they linger within the scholarships themselves," he says.

The Rhodes Scholarships to Oxford were founded by the Will of Cecil John Rhodes and have been operating since 1903. Rhodes had himself been to Oxford, and had such a high regard for the University that he wanted people from what was then the British Empire, and from the United States and Germany, to benefit from the intellectual, cultural, social and sporting opportunities Oxford offers. He therefore expected Rhodes Scholars to be sufficiently intellectually and academically able to achieve a good degree while enjoying the additional benefits of Oxford life.

For more information on the Rhodes scholars and the scholarship please check the following links: <http://www.uct.ac.za/googlesearch/?q=rhodes+scholarship> ; <http://uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=9516> ; <http://uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=9518> ; <http://uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=9520> ; <http://uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=9517>

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