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Khayelitsha learners experience varsity life through UCT summer school

A hundred grade 12 learners from various schools in Khayelitsha had a taste of the first year University of Cape Town (UCT) experience when they attended three special lectures as part of the extended annual UCT Summer School.

The learners are participants in UCT's 100UP programme, a three-year enrichment initiative started in 2011 to address the low numbers of disadvantaged learners from Western Cape townships entering the university. It is the flagship project of UCT's Schools Improvement Initiative (SII).

"We discovered that there were many black African students here at UCT, but most of them were not from Western Cape townships," explained project manager Mrs Ferial Parker.

To remedy this, the university committed to selecting five academically-gifted grade 10 learners from each of the 20 schools in Khayelitsha on an annual basis, whom they then continue to support throughout the final three years of high school. Opportunities given to these learners as part of the 100UP programme include academic booster classes on campus every Saturday, and intensive preparation sessions in the run-up to exams.

Since 2018, 100UP joined forces with UCT Summer School to offer the learners further opportunities for enrichment. Medeé Rall, director of the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, says the collaboration is mutually beneficial as the presence of the 100UP learners brings a welcome diversity of culture and age to the traditional Summer School.

The learners also get to spend a few days – five for grade 12s and three for grade 11s – living in residence on campus and attending talks by faculty members and administrative staff from across the university during the June/July school holidays.

Efforts on each of the lecturers' parts to make their talks as interesting and engaging as possible were rewarded with positive feedback from learners. "The lecturers were awesome. They exposed us to different types of opportunities that we can pursue," said Kamva Mjanyelwa from Manyano High School.

The impact of the programme, however, clearly goes beyond academic benefits, as it also builds confidence and equips learners with important life skills. "It has given me a bigger perspective on life and teaches me to communicate well. I've learned how to interact with

different people and it's given me a lot of confidence," said Luvo Jama from Bulumko Secondary School.

The 100UP participants have been the perfect addition to the Summer School programme, as it also offers them an opportunity to expand their own horizons and be introduced to many different fields of study and future careers.

"We want to show them that there are many things to be interested in and to instil a sense of curiosity and a desire to keep learning when they leave university," added Rall.

The learners attended three specially selected Summer School lectures of one hour each in the Kramer Building's Lecture Theatre 1, a venue that offered an exciting introduction to the university's learning environment.

The learners don't keep the knowledge, skills and resources they have gained through the programme to themselves, but instead return to their schools to share these with their friends and classmates.

A parallel programme recruits another 100 or so matriculants from 16 Mitchells Plain schools just after the June examinations each year. They become the Gill Net group and receive an intensive third-term revision programme, along with support in the university application process, National Benchmark Test (NBT) writing, and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) application.

This year, 100 of the project learners were accepted at UCT and 109 gained entry to other institutions across the country, translating into a remarkable success rate for the programme. Once these learners enter the university, they are not left to their own devices, but continue to be supported academically and emotionally as 100UP Plus students in UCT's First-Year Experience (FYE) programme.

The project is certainly making an impression as Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng has indicated that she hopes to see it expand even further in the near future.

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