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South Africa's first deaf student to graduate with a Bachelor of Laws degree at UCT

Oobo Ningiza will be South Africa's first deaf Bachelor of Laws degree graduate when he is capped at a University of Cape Town (UCT) graduation ceremony next Friday, 12 April 2019.

Born and raised in Ntseshe location, Ngqamakhwe District in the Eastern Cape, Ningiza is the fifth of six children. He describes his schooling experience as one of severe disadvantage since the limited resources at schools for the deaf meant that learners had to share textbooks and make do with poor infrastructure. A shortage of teachers meant they could also not choose their subjects but had to comply with a prescribed list.

Ningiza's schooling experience instilled in him a desire to seek equality and motivated him to pursue tertiary studies in law. He is currently pursuing his LLM (master's) and applying to law firms to serve his articles next year. But this is a challenge since firms have thus far been hesitant to accept him as they do not have facilities for deaf candidates. However, he remains hopeful that an opportunity will soon emerge and that he can begin his career.

"There is nothing I want more than to make a difference in other people's lives. I believe that we are a country with a lot of potential and that many of our problems would disappear if we focused our energy on assisting those in need," he shared about his aspiration to pursue a career in human rights law.

However, Ningiza is not new to challenges as he experienced the same obstacle when trying to gain entrance to a university that would accommodate a deaf law student. He recalled using public transport to travel the long distance to one such institution for registration where he befriended another aspiring student.

When they arrived, the offices had already closed, so they spent the night sleeping next to a lamp post in the parking lot. When Ningiza finally got an interview he was told, within the first five minutes, that the institution would not be able to provide sign language interpreters and he was denied access yet again.

At UCT, however, Ningiza's experience was quite different. The Disability Service, which receives much of its funding from donors, facilitated his registration for tuition and residence, helped him to access comprehensive bursaries to address his financial situation and assisted with sign language interpretation. His fellow students also assisted with taking notes in class as it was impossible to take notes himself while concentrating simultaneously on an interpreter.

The UCT graduation ceremonies will take place from 10-18 April.



UCT's Qobo Ningiza (right) on campus with sign language interpreter Tshepiso Mokoena.

Photo: Merlin Ince

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