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UCT student trio named among global next generation leaders



From left: Zukile Ntentema (Supplied), Vuthlarhi Shirindza (Supplied) and Funwako Dlamini (Supplied)

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Three University of Cape Town (UCT) students have been selected among a global cohort of 40 for the Next Generation Leaders programme. This has been designed to harness diverse and ethical approaches to civic engagement and activism.

The programme is an initiative by the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

Each of the three, Vuthlarhi Shirindza, Zukile Ntentema and Funwako Dlamini, ticked all the boxes in terms of requirements: a commitment to civic engagement and making a difference in the lives of others through practising good citizenship and social responsibility, by way of their political activism, applied research, social entrepreneurship and other forms of service.

The trio will also participate in the Talloires Network Global Leaders Conference, which will be hosted at Tufts University and Harvard University in the United States from 30 September to 3 October.

Shirindza is a fourth-year medical student and completed an honours in biomedical sciences, majoring in medical biochemistry, at UCT last year. Ntentema is a first-year Bachelor of Social Work student. Dlamini has embarked on a Master of Public Health, specialising in health systems.

For all three this opportunity offers them the unique opportunity to connect and converse with like-minded leaders and provides them a platform from which to share their passions and solutions.

"It's offered to me the unique opportunity to connect and converse with like-minded leaders from different corners of the world on a global platform. This is a chance to engage on civil matters that affect us all and dissect these problems from multinational [and] multilevel points of view. But most importantly, I am excited about developing creative, original and practical solutions by joining heads with other leaders so that I can return to my community and make a sustainable and impactful difference," shared Shirindza who plans on launching an e-health medical app start-up, that she is currently working on.

The app has been designed to make general practitioner consultations convenient, safer and cheaper. Bu this is not all for Shirindza who is looking forward to the roll-out of the drone delivery of medication in rural and township areas by the company she co-founded, RaAzi.

"My plan is to publish a series of children's books for young, black, avid readers with themes focusing on identity, culture and self-love. I also plan to be the best doctor I can be for the patients and communities I serve after I graduate. I aspire to do a master's in public health and, eventually, a PhD in clinical research. My dream is to start a foundation for young, black women offering mentorship in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and health-related academia, entrepreneurship – and in their personal lives," she added.

Ntentema is thinking long-term too. "My plan is to take the term "socially engaged student" to another level. According to the Western Cape MEC of community safety [Albert Fritz], Cape Town is facing a violence pandemic, and according to the global list determined by the annual Mexican Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice, Cape Town ranked eighth among the most violent cities in the world. Part of my plan therefore is to invent game-changing interventions that will help remediate the violent problems we face in the city. (I have already kick-started plans for innovative interventions.) I also want to contribute to developing leading-edge public and social policies that will address societal needs and social ills through research and implementation."

Speaking on the programme he shared that this is an opportunity to sharpen his leadership skills to continue adding value to his community. "It also means that I will be part of a community-of-practice network that will learn from me as I also learn from them. It means the world to me."

With an interest in improving access to psychiatric healthcare in Africa's healthcare systems, Dlamini is hoping to join an international organisation in the future to work on revamping the structures of our policies.

"I want to be at centre of decision-making within the public sector, apply evidence-based policy tools and lead global communities committed to the critical issues of the day. "I'm confident that the programme will offer me both theoretical and practical knowledge that will be key in employing a critical-thinking approach to making a long-lasting change in underserved populations. It will allow me to meet diverse but like-minded individuals from across the world, turn my passions into tangible solutions and to be unafraid of challenging the status quo," he shared.

His aim is to ensure "accessible, quality mental health services for underserved communities.

"I'm also looking at setting up a non-governmental organisation in the Kingdom of Eswatini that will offer free psychosocial support for children and young adults who are survivors of domestic and sexual abuse."

Shirindza, Ntentema and Dlamini will each work on a different civic engagement theme: Pandemic Recovery and Resilience, Civic Engagement Futures and Structured Listening Methods respectively.

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