



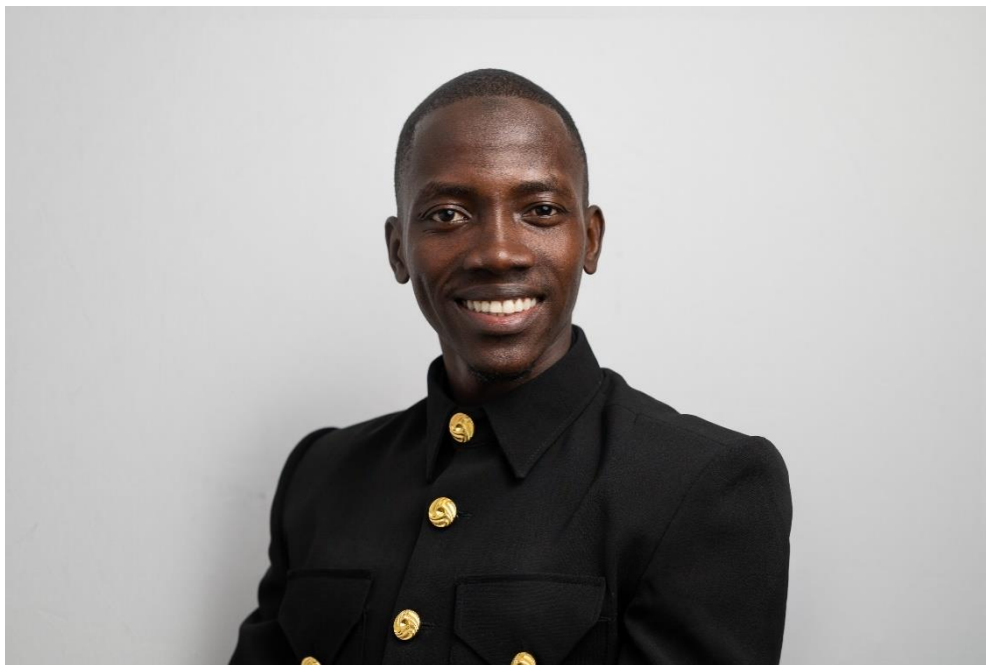
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UCT postgraduate student wins prestigious international scholarship



UCT postgraduate student, Muhammed Coker, has secured a McCall MacBain Scholarship. Photo: supplied.

A University of Cape Town (UCT) postgraduate who was named an international scholarship finalist earlier in 2026 has now secured one of the world's most prestigious leadership-based awards, marking a defining moment in a journey shaped by purpose, resilience and impact.

Muhammed Coker, who recently completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Management and Entrepreneurship at UCT as a Mandela Rhodes Foundation scholar, has been awarded a \$40,000 McCall MacBain Scholarship. He will pursue a Master of Science in Agricultural Economics at McGill University later in 2026.

His selection follows a highly competitive international process and places him among a small cohort of emerging leaders recognised for their commitment to creating meaningful change.

For Coker, however, the significance of the award extends far beyond personal achievement.

“Receiving this award is deeply emotional for me because it represents more than personal success,” he said. “It symbolises possibility for every young person from an underrepresented background who has ever wondered whether their dreams are valid.”

Coker said his time at UCT fundamentally reshaped his understanding of leadership.

“One of the biggest things I learned at UCT was that leadership is deeply rooted in collaboration and vulnerability. I arrived thinking impact was mostly about individual excellence and hard work, but UCT taught me the power of diverse perspectives, difficult conversations, and learning from people whose experiences are very different from my own.”

Outside of academics, he said he learned how to navigate uncertainty and challenge his own assumptions.

“I was able to grow in spaces that constantly pushed me outside my comfort zone. That experience shaped not only how I think, but also the kind of leader I want to become.”

A defining moment during his studies came through a student-led initiative called “Unipay”, which aimed to connect students to short-term job opportunities to help ease financial pressures.

“What made the experience so powerful for me was realising how many students quietly carry the burden of financial stress while trying to pursue their education. Through this project, I began to see leadership differently, not as a position or title, but as the ability to identify real challenges affecting people and work collaboratively to create practical solutions,” said Coker.

The experience deepened his focus on human-centred impact and reinforced the importance of empathy, teamwork and service-driven leadership.

“More importantly, it reinforced my belief that meaningful leadership is rooted in service and in creating opportunities that empower others to thrive,” he said.

Coker’s commitment to impact extends beyond the classroom. As the founder of Agro Incubation Hub, he has supported youth and women smallholder farmers in adopting sustainable agricultural practices, while also facilitating business development and financial literacy.

Reflecting on his time at UCT, Coker described the university as a space that challenged him intellectually, socially and personally.

“It pushed me to believe that my story and experiences also belong in global conversations.”

He added that his experiences at the university helped shape both his confidence and sense of purpose.

“By the time I applied [for the McCall MacBain Scholarship], I was no longer coming from a place of self-doubt, but from a place of purpose and authenticity,” he explained.

At McGill University, Coker plans to explore how smallholder farmers engage with agricultural technologies and food security programmes, particularly in contexts shaped by resource constraints and climate change.

“I carry this opportunity not only for myself, but for many people whose hopes are tied to my journey,” he said.

For current and prospective postgraduate students, his message is one of courage and self-belief.

“You don’t need everything figured out. Courage is often more important than confidence – you just need to believe that your voice, your work and your dreams matter.”

“I come from a humble family background, and there were many moments where I questioned whether I truly belonged in these spaces. Sometimes, the very experiences that make you doubt yourself are the same experiences that make your story powerful,” he concluded.

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