

UFS STUDENT LEADER ETHICS CHARTER



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STUDENT AFFAIRS
STUDENTESAKE
DITABA TSA BAITHUTI





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INTRODUCTION

Ethical leadership is essential for building ethical institutions and societies. In higher education, leadership development is central – because higher education is leadership education.

This charter affirms the University of the Free State's commitment to ethical student leadership. It draws inspiration from Nelson Mandela's belief that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world," and Mahatma Gandhi's call to "Be the change you wish to see in the world".

These insights highlight that ethical leadership begins with personal responsibility and has the power to shape communities. Leadership is the most potent driver of moral behaviour. It is about influence, not just authority.



PURPOSE

The **Ethics Charter** provides a values-based framework to guide and promote ethical conduct among student governance structures. It supports the UFS Strategic Plan <https://ufsweb.co/strategic-plan> and Vision 130 <https://ufsweb.co/vision130>, as well as the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) Strategic Plan <https://ufsweb.co/dsa-strat-plan> by promoting ethical leadership, personal accountability, and a culture of integrity.

It complements the ISRC Code of Conduct <https://ufsweb.co/isrc-code> and the UFS Disciplinary Code and Procedure, 'THE CODE': <https://ufsweb.co/the-code> by focusing on values and ethical decision-making rather than disciplinary rules.

The charter aims to

- align student governance structures with UFS values and goals;
- reinforce ethical practices and decision-making;
- promote fairness, dignity, and social justice; and
- encourage ethical leadership as a daily practice.

Student leaders are expected to uphold the following UFS values:

- **Excellence** – Lead with high standards in service and scholarship.
- **Innovation and Impact** – Contribute creatively and meaningfully.
- **Accountability** – Be transparent and responsible.
- **Care** – Foster empathy, inclusivity, and well-being.
- **Social Justice** – Advocate for fairness and equal opportunity.
- **Sustainability** – Make ethical choices for long-term benefit.



EXCELLENCE



**INNOVATION
AND IMPACT**



ACCOUNTABILITY



CARE



SOCIAL JUSTICE



SUSTAINABILITY



SCOPE

The Executive Director: Student Affairs is the custodian of this charter. The charter applies to all student governance structures, sub-structures, and co-governance structures, including the Institutional Student Representative Council (ISRC), Campus Student Representative Councils (CSRCs), Faculty Student Council (FSC), associations and organisations, residence committees (RCs), as well as the Institutional Student Parliament (ISP), the Institutional Student Court (ISC), Campus Student Parliament (CSP), and Campus Student Court (CSC).

Key responsibilities:

- Uphold ethical conduct in all student governance activities.
- Promote sincere and inclusive human relations.
- Share the charter standards with all student leaders and all fellow students.



ETHICAL COMMITMENT AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Ethical leadership means doing what is right – even when it is difficult or no one is watching. Students must make intentional ethical choices, reflect on their values, and take personal responsibility for their actions. They are also entrusted with the responsibility to influence peers positively.

MY COMMITMENT:

I commit to ethical leadership and ethical conduct in all my roles.

MY PLEDGE:

I pledge to uphold the following ethical standards:

DUE DILIGENCE:

I shall

- act according to South African legislation and the rules, policies, procedures, and values of the UFS;
- reject illegal or unethical behaviour;
- carry out my duties with care, commitment, and enthusiasm;
- be responsive to stakeholders' legitimate expectations; and
- honour commitments and keep promises.



UFS PHYSICAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY:

I shall respect UFS property:

- Protect and take care of physical and intellectual assets.
- Condemn misuse or unethical handling of university resources.



INTEGRITY:

I shall act with integrity:

- Be truthful in all interactions and reporting.
- Encourage ethical behaviour in others.
- Exercise authority with respect and fairness.
- Avoid conflicts of interest by
 - seeking clarity when unsure; and
 - declaring any actual or potential conflicts of interest.

A conflict of interest occurs when personal interests clash with the university's interests, compromising the duty to act in the institution's best interest.



Examples include the following:

- External activities that intersect with university responsibilities.
- Relationships that may influence decisions.
- Giving or receiving gifts that could affect impartiality.

DIGNITY:

I shall uphold human dignity:

- Advocate for human rights and embrace diversity and inclusion.
- Report violations of rights.
- Help create a safe and respectful campus environment.
- Treat others with fairness, honesty, dignity, and respect.



UFS AMBASSADOR:

I shall be an ambassador of UFS values:

- Model ethical behaviour and positively influence peers.
- Reflect the charter's standards in daily interactions and decisions.
- Engage in honest, constructive conversations about ethics.
- Embrace and promote an ethical culture.



IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT

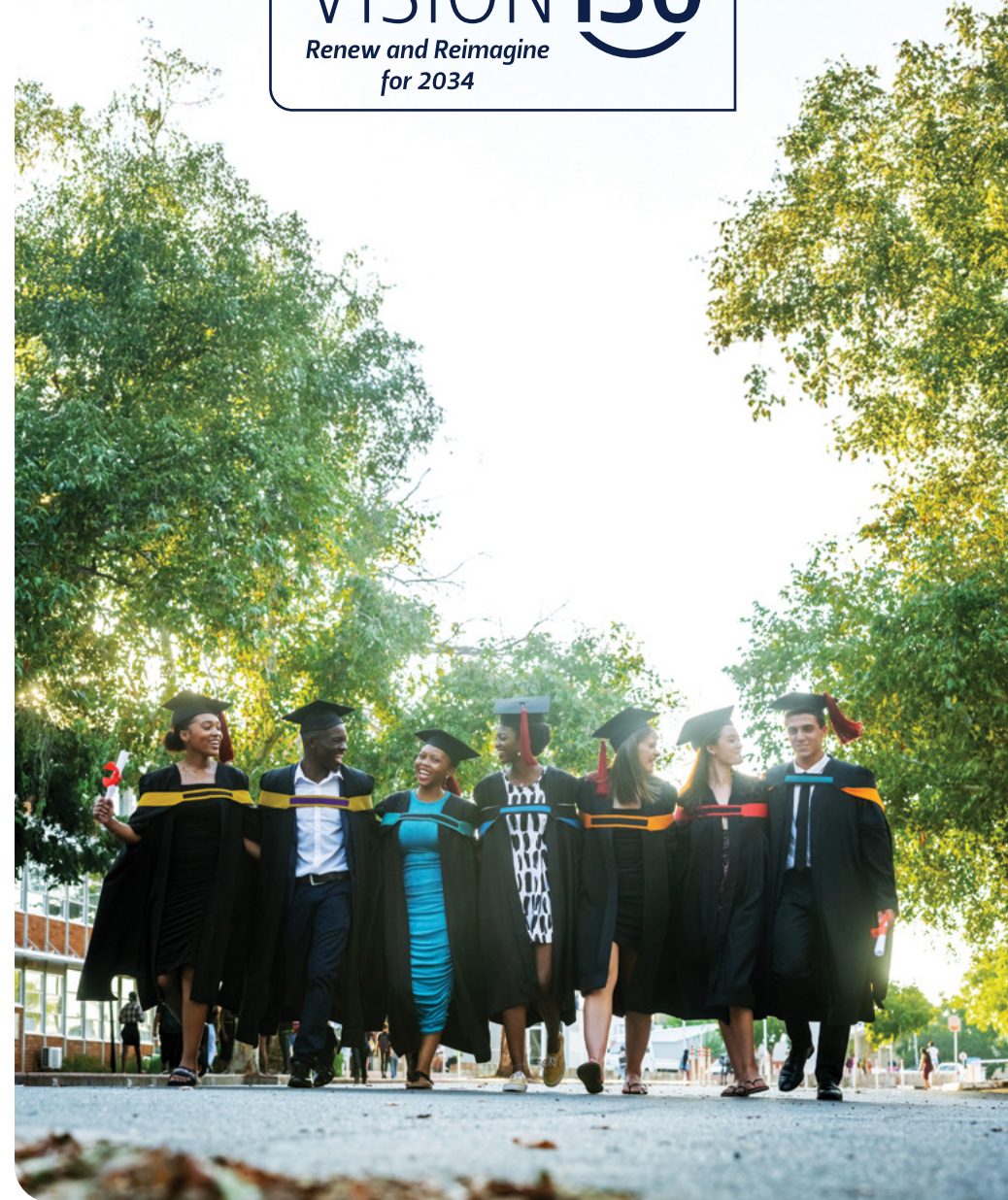
To embed ethics in student governance, the following support mechanisms will be provided:

- Ethics Induction Training – Orientation on ethical standards and decision-making.
- Guidance from DSA Staff – Support on interpreting ethical standards, honouring confidentiality, and reporting concerns.
- Peer-led Disciplinary Processes – Clearly defined procedures and escalation pathways in line with university policies.
- Pocketbook – Practical guide with scenarios and strategies for ethical situations.
- Peer Accountability and Support System – A buddy system for ethical reflection and mutual accountability.
- Badges and Pledges – Visible and verbal affirmations of ethical commitment.
- Round-table Discussions – Forums for student input and reflection.
- Monitoring and Feedback – Mechanisms to assess and improve ethical conduct.

CONCLUSION

This charter supports UFS **Vision 130** by promoting excellence, innovation, accountability, care, social justice, and sustainability. It contributes to the development of globally competitive graduates and an ethical institutional culture that positively impacts the university and society.

VISION 130
*Renew and Reimagine
for 2034*





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