



STUDENT AFFAIRS ETHICS CHARTER FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS



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INTRODUCTION

The building of an ethically responsible society in South Africa, and beyond, is a goal that is actively pursued by organisations like the Ethics Institute of South Africa and Ethics Monitor. As well as making significant contributions towards establishing ethics in different spheres of society, they also aim to build ethical leaders for the future.

This focus on the development of future leaders, especially in a higher education context, is something that the Global Ethics organisation specifically prioritises. It states that “higher education is leadership education” and that a substantial part of preparing future leaders depends on developing value-driven leadership in higher education students (Global Ethics 2017). Thus, this Student Affairs Ethics Charter (SAET) aims to align the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) at the University of the Free State (UFS) with these goals and objectives. This alignment is important, not only to develop ethically grounded student leaders at the UFS, but also to promote ethical standards for Student Affairs as a profession.

In this regard, the SAET (as an initiative to actively promote ethical standards in Student Affairs) should be seen as part of other initiatives to advance the professionalisation of Student Affairs at the UFS and beyond, namely: establishing a professional development route for staff (especially on post-graduate level); fostering data-driven praxis and research; upholding the theoretical underpinnings of Student Affairs praxis; and employing full-time staff members in different functional areas of Student Affairs.

It is against the backdrop of these overarching goals and objectives that the institutional purpose of the SAET becomes important.

PURPOSE OF THE ETHICS CHARTER

The UFS Strategic Plan and the Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP) signal the University's commitment to widen the scope and radically accelerate transformation in the University. University culture is a complex set of ingrained behaviours, practices and norms governing the experience of those who study and work in the institution.

If the future we seek is that of excellence and diversity, the University will have an institutional culture that values and encourages differences, that is, different approaches, different perspectives and differences in disability, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, place of origin, values and beliefs. The institutional culture will also be a culture of high performance, equality and a culture that respects human dignity and the human rights of others.

The ITP framework encourages the adoption of new practices, modes of organisation and values capable of delivering social justice.

This Charter therefore presents core principles that define the ethos of the UFS and serve as reference points for the entire University community by creating shared ethical principles.

During 2018, we, as the Division of Student Affairs, held a number of conversations, reflecting on our core principles. This was important, because we seek to lead in ways that go beyond the traditional expectations set for Student Affairs professionals. This initiative demonstrates our focus on innovation, exploring possibilities and finding creative solutions to current challenges facing higher-education students and universities today. With this document, we make a conscious commitment to lead through our core principles, to create a humanising Student Affairs culture and an institutional culture that will enable us to reach our strategic objectives (in the Division of Student Affairs and the UFS), uphold ethical practices and contribute meaningfully to our different communities and the natural environment. Thus, we strive to lead from a deep sense of purpose and commitment to life-affirming principles so that our service benefits all stakeholders in society. To this effect, we consider ourselves part of a community, society and the nation, and, therefore, aim to provide solutions to those challenges that face us as the Division of Student Affairs, the University community and society in general.

The Division of Student Affairs identified five principles as part of the Humanising Strategy 2017-2022, namely: humanity, ethics, critical-diversity literacy, social justice and integrity. Together with these six principles, the Division of Student Affairs identified five key strategic areas (KSA): professionalisation, high-impact practices, student communities, governance and structures, Multi-Campus Model (collaboration) and Institutional Transformation Plan (institutional change, social justice, social cohesion and critical diversity).

For each KSA an interdepartmental team has been established in order to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the strategy. So, for each principle, each KSA team has made an undertaking on how it will live this principle.

SCOPE OF THE ETHICS CHARTER

- In practice, the Student Affairs Ethics Charter will apply to Student Affairs staff, students and all its stakeholders.
- The custodian of the Student Affairs Ethics Charter will be the Dean of Student Affairs.
- The Student Affairs Ethics Charter defines ethical conduct by staff, students and stakeholders, promotes high ethical standards and establishes a framework for ethical lifestyles.
- Student Affairs professionals are expected to maintain human relations that are sincere and inclusive.
- The entire Student Affairs management team (with special emphasis on Heads of Departments, individually and collectively) is charged with applying the Student Affairs Ethics Charter to Student Affairs services and programmes and University activities. It is imperative that the principles contained in the Student Affairs Ethics Charter be shared with all Student Affairs staff likely to exercise significant power and influence over students and other staff members.

AUTHORITY

- The Student Affairs Ethics Charter is a building block towards an ethical Student Affairs profession. It is also a further commitment by Student Affairs leadership and its staff to the highest ethical standards, the kind of standards that recognise that legal compliance satisfies only the most basic level of ethical conduct and therefore is not enough to ensure social integration, social justice and social cohesion.
- Ethics education, dialogue and awareness should be broadly introduced to the Student Affairs co-curricular content.
- The introduction of ethics education to Student Affairs will be an imaginative intervention and the dialogues on how to live ethically within the context of the UFS will generate a new culture with an ethical foundation.
- These interventions will provide knowledge, clarity, understanding, assurance and confidence to the Student Affairs community and its partners that the University is a safe space, that it embraces differences and has a culture of integrity.

IMPLEMENTATION

- All new staff members should be inducted in an ethical lifestyle as outlined in the Student Affairs Ethics Charter, which should be accessible in electronic and/or printed format for easy access and reference.
- The principles of the Student Affairs Ethics Charter should be reflected in the daily activities of staff and in the manner with which they do business with one another and external partners.
- The Student Affairs professional culture will be represented by only the highest standard of ethical conduct that affirms human dignity and respects the human rights of others.

ETHICAL INTENT

- In support of UFS's and the Division of Student Affairs' strategic thrusts, we commit ourselves individually and collectively to the highest standards of ethics, corporate governance and social justice ideals.
- We pledge to be humane in our interaction with members of the University community and its external partners.
- We promise to recognise the dignity inherent in human beings and to embrace differences.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

WE SHALL CONDUCT OUR DAILY ACTIVITIES WITH DUE DILIGENCE

To achieve this, we shall:

- Act in accordance with the laws, policies and procedures of the UFS and the Student Affairs Ethics Charter;
- Undertake our duties with due care, commitment and enthusiasm;
- Be responsive to the legitimate expectations of all our stakeholders;
- Adhere to the principles of good corporate governance;
- Honour our obligations and deliver timeously on our promises;
- Behave in a fair and honest manner; and
- Respect others at all times.

WE SHALL RESPECT THE PHYSICAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF UFS AND ITS PARTNERS

In this regard, we shall:

- Preserve and protect the assets of UFS in whatever form or nature; and
- Condemn any form of illegal and/or unethical conduct with regards to the property of the University.

WE SHALL ACT WITH THE UTMOST INTEGRITY WHEN DISCHARGING OUR DUTIES

We shall:

- Be truthful and honest in all our dealings with staff, students, service providers and members of the public;
- Be honest in accounting for the work done and in reporting;
- Create conditions that will discourage unethical behavior;
- Support, protect and encourage staff, students, service providers and members of the public; and
- Pre-emptively declare, seek clarity and/or avoid circumstances and conditions that may lead to a conflict of interests.

Conflicts of interest may be caused by:

- Activities outside the University but related to the University;
- Relationships between staff, students, service providers and members of the public; and
- Accepting gifts in any form or nature and giving gifts in any form or nature.

WE SHALL RECOGNISE THE BASIC HUMAN DIGNITY OF OTHERS

We shall:

- Advocate for the basic human rights of others as entrenched in the South African Constitution (especially those that relate to differences, i.e. gender, race, disability, class, sexual orientation, place of origin, religion etc.);
- Follow due process, where necessary, and report any staff, student, service provider or member of the public who disregards and/or violates or attempts to violate the basic human rights of others;
- Make UFS a safe and healthy space for staff, students, service providers, and members of the public; and
- Treat fellow colleagues, students, service providers and members of the public with dignity.

WE SHALL BE AMBASSADORS FOR THE VALUES OF THE UFS

We shall:

- Demonstrate imaginative and ethical behaviour in our daily lives;
- Show good character in how we approach our work and in our interactions with each other;
- Have honest and critical conversations on how to live ethical lifestyles as set out in the Student Affairs Ethics Charter; and
- Embrace an ethical lifestyle.

ETHICS SUPPORT

- Staff will require support, guidance and clarity from time to time with respect to living in accordance with the prescripts of the Student Affairs Ethics Charter.
- This may occur when staff members are unsure about an ethical decision, its implications or actions they are required to carry out in a particular situation. This can also be applied in instances where staff suspect inappropriate and/or unethical behaviour.

GUIDANCE, CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY:

- In order to ensure the effectiveness of the Student Affairs Ethics Charter, sufficient guidance must be provided for staff and other stakeholders so as to help them understand and distinguish between ethical and unethical behaviour.
- Adequate information must also be provided with regards to the confidential and/or anonymous reporting process when behaviour inconsistent with the principles enshrined in the Student Affairs Ethics Charter is observed.
- Guidance can be sought from Heads of Departments, and/or the Dean of Student Affairs if the Student Affairs Ethics Charter provides insufficient clarity on ethical guidance.
- Reporting of suspected unethical or fraudulent behaviour can be directed to Heads of Departments, human resources, and/or the Dean of Student Affairs, and/or the Vice-Rector Institutional Change, Student Affairs and Community Engagement for confidentiality purposes and/or the KPMG Ethics Hotline number 0800 006 704 or email fraud@kpmg.co.za.
- All managers at different levels and anyone who is tasked to respond to cases of unethical conduct should deal with information and reports with the strictest confidentiality.



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