

## **STUDENT AFFAIRS**

### **OPERATING CONTEXT, GOVERNANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

#### **Operating context**

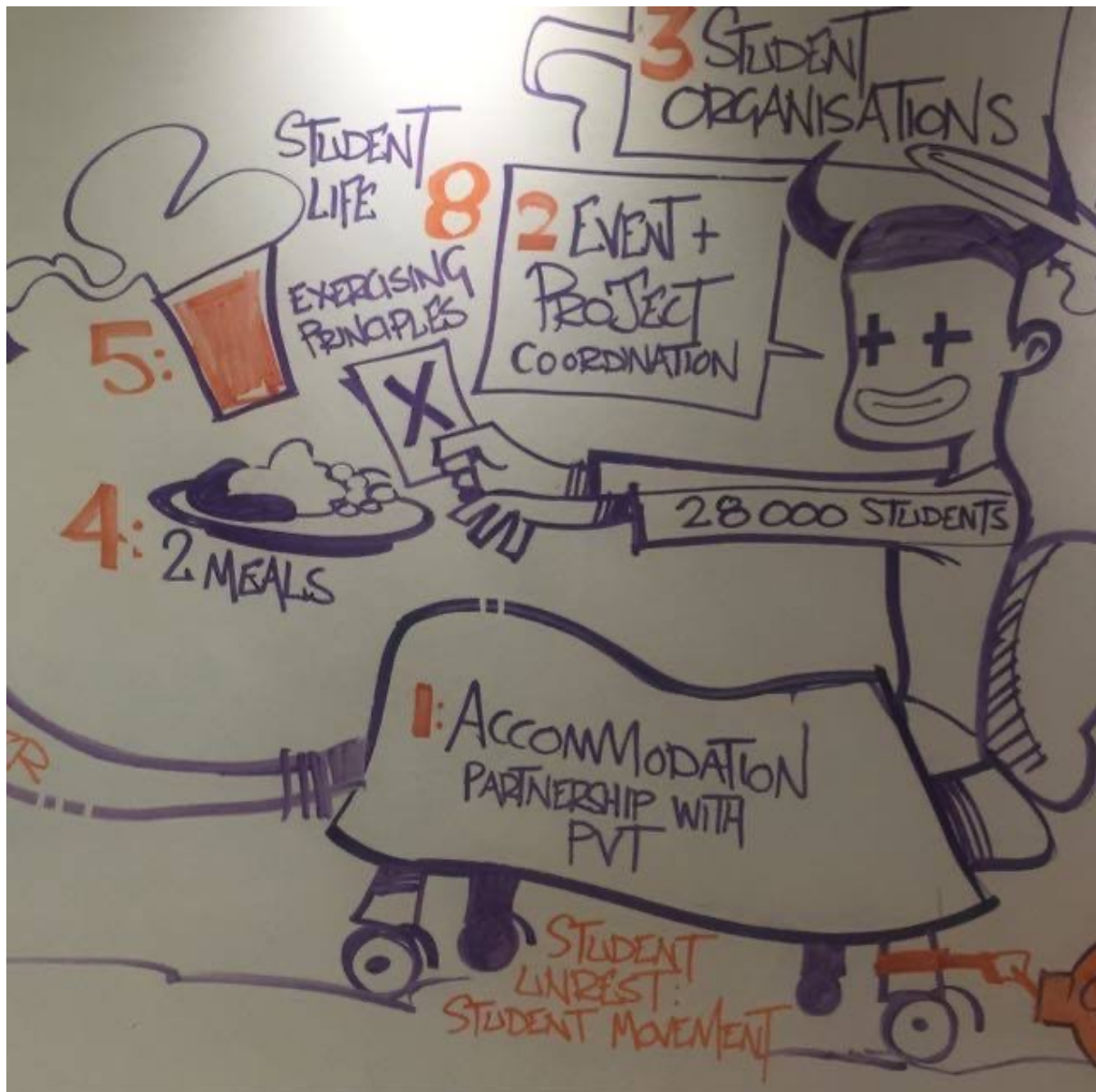
During 2021, in addition to student wellness, the Division of Student Affairs also prioritised student stability and relations as the foundation for an enriching student-friendly learning and living environment. COVID-19 continued to be the main challenge. The interaction of Student Affairs with the students of the University, particularly with student leaders, was largely online or virtual. Physical interactions were kept at a minimum, and when required, COVID-19 measures and regulations were adhered to and complied with. In conjunction with other internal support stakeholders and the faculties, the Division advocated and promoted student safety and security while supporting the initiatives of the University to deliver quality education and research virtually or online. The Student Representative Council and House Committees played a big role in ensuring that students maximised the available means and resources in pursuit of teaching and learning.

In 2021, Student Affairs comprised two subdivisions, namely Student Accommodation and Residence Life (SARL) and Student Life and Governance (SLG), and two units called Student Ethics and Discipline (SED), and University and Student Liaison (USL). However, the University and Student Liaison Unit had to minimise its operations, given that the Head of USL was appointed as Acting Director: Student Life and Governance.

The primary function of SARL was to provide student accommodation in both residences and privately owned student accommodation (POSA) off-campus, while also providing a platform for outstanding student life programmes. The provision of student accommodation entails the following components: admission and placement of students in residences; student life in residence; residence operations; and accredited privately owned student accommodation (POSA). The normal contact student life programmes in residences and POSA continued to be affected by the several alert levels of nationwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, vacation accommodation, which would normally be provided to external organisations, was suspended due to the pandemic. At the same time, residence students who could not go home or to their respective places of dwelling during the lockdown were allowed to remain in residence.

In its responsibility of providing opportunities for a preferred student experience, Student Life and Governance (SLG) coordinated student development activities, while moving these online. For this purpose, Student Affairs provided extra data so that students, and particularly student leaders, could participate effectively in the developmental activities. Furthermore, SLG provided administrative support to student structures, such as the Student Representative Council (SRC), student societies, and house committees, as well as general student development programmes. In conjunction with Student Ethics and Discipline (SED), SLG was also responsible for order and discipline. However, disciplinary enquiries, including investigations, disciplinary hearings, alternative dispute resolution measures, such as discipline through dialogue, and conflict resolution and reparation, were dealt with through the Student Ethics and Discipline Unit. At the same time, the University and Student Liaison Unit undertook advocacy functions, creating opportunities for partnerships and productive relations between student leaders and University management.

With the goal of providing support to each student of the University, Student Affairs ensured that aspects of student wellness, including student hunger, basic needs like sanitary towels, psychosocial support, safety and security, risky student behaviour and student governance, were attended to in response to the challenging and changing needs of student communities. Several programmes promoting student ethics were also initiated and undertaken by Student Affairs in partnership with both internal and external stakeholders.



## Governance

The Senior Executive Director: University Relations, Student Affairs and UJ Sport provides strategic and executive leadership and oversight to Student Affairs and supports the Division in realigning its purpose to its functional structure. The Senior Director: Student Affairs provides day-to-day leadership in terms of developing strategic and operational plans for the year and operationalising the strategic decisions of the University. In turn, the Directors of Student Accommodation and Residence Life, and of Student Life and Governance, report to the Senior Director: Student Affairs, as do the Head: University and Student Liaison, and the Head: Student Ethics and Discipline. Furthermore, two heads of functions report to the Director: Student Accommodation and Residence Life, namely the Head: Privately Owned Student Accommodation (POSA) and the Head:

Residence Operations. Another two heads of functions report to the Director: Student Life and Governance, namely the Head: Student Governance and the Head: Student Life. Student Affairs has formed a Student Affairs Management Team (SAMT), drawing together the Senior Director: Student Affairs, the two directors of subdivisions and the six heads of functions. The SAMT functioned optimally and enhanced the Division's level of responsiveness to student needs, both virtually and in contact.

Student Affairs provided administrative and managerial support to several student governance structures. These were the Central Student Representative Council (CSRC) and the four campus SRCs (all together constituting the UJSRC of 2021). The 16-member CSRC consisted of eight elected members plus the chairpersons and secretaries of the campus SRCs. Each campus SRC had 10 members, and this brought the total number of the SRC members to 48. In addition, the house committees, student societies and various student committee structures benefited from the administrative and managerial support of Student Affairs.

The House Committee Primaria Council, made up of the chairpersons of all UJ residence house committees and day-house committees – one for each of the 26 residences and seven day-houses – formed the core of the student governance structures in the residences. Several consultative subcommittees were in place to provide support to the house committees. These consisted of mentors and the residence academic advisors who facilitated the residence academic programme. In addition, the Residence Monitoring Committee, comprising a residence manager, house committee members, house wardens and the Head of Student Life, was responsible for monitoring residence operations and maintenance matters. Lastly, the Residence Oversight Committee comprised staff and students who monitored the residence induction programme during the first three months of the academic year and reported on activities in residences that were not in line with UJ values.

Student Ethics and Discipline constituted the Student Disciplinary Committees, which dealt with most of the reported disciplinary cases. The Student Disciplinary Committees were constituted with a chairperson, an assessor, an SRC representative and Student Ethics and Discipline officials who acted as presenters and administrators during the student disciplinary hearings. The appointed chairpersons were external legal experts. Student Affairs submitted quarterly reports on student disciplinary processes to Senate and Council.

The management of Student Affairs held monthly meetings with the UJSRC and house committees, as well as quarterly meetings with leaders of student societies, in order to ensure good governance and quality management. However, in relation to projects like academic registration, meetings with the UJSRC took place on a weekly basis.

The structures of governance mentioned above and the functions and operations of Student Affairs were directed by a number of policies, such as the SRC Constitution, the Electoral Policy, Societies Policy, Policy on Privately Owned Student Accommodation, Student Regulations and Regulations for Student Discipline.



## Risk management

Student Affairs had to ensure that the identified risks did not hinder the work of Student Affairs and/or the University, the main risk being that of *disruptive student protest*. The following risks were mitigated through the interventions put in place:

- *Student stability and relations* – Student Affairs continued engaging student leaders and formations on issues of potential dispute, such as declaring the University and its facilities as a mandatory vaccination

site; SRC elections; disciplinary enquiries against a large number of students due to online academic dishonesty; and the fee increase for the following year.

- *Prevention of the spread of COVID-19 and further infections of students in the University residences and approved privately owned student accommodation* – Students remaining in residences had to sign an undertaking that they would adhere to the regulations and measures meant to prevent infections and/or spread of the coronavirus. The University provided personal protective equipment, such as masks and sanitisers, to students.
- *Safety and security of students* – With some hard and painful experiences encountered, including the untimely loss of 15 student lives during the year, Student Affairs collaborated with Protection Services and the local police stations. In partnership with PsyCaD, Student Affairs provided counselling and support to the affected students. In the case of the passing of a student, counselling and support was extended to the family of the deceased.
- *Operations and requirements of POSAs* – Some reported activities of and/or in POSAs made it necessary to start the process of reviewing the POSA Policy and the Accreditation Process, in order to elevate the level of governance requirements and credibility.

## **STRATEGIC FOCUS AND TARGETS**

Student Affairs provided support to the six strategic objectives of the University, primarily through Strategic Objective Four: An enriching student-friendly learning and living experience. At the same time, Student Affairs also contributed to the other strategic objectives.

### **Strategic Objective One: Excellence in research and innovation**

Student Affairs provided excellent accommodation for postgraduate students, which offered the space and resources conducive to creating excellence in research and innovation. In 2021, most of the postgraduate students, including a few undergraduate students with clinical or community-based work requirements, opted to remain in residence during lockdown.

### **Strategic Objective Two: Excellence in teaching and learning**

In 2021, UJ had the capacity to accommodate 32 762 of the enrolled students on- and off-campus. Privately owned student accommodation

accounted for 79% (25 392) of the available accommodation. On-campus residences (6 830 beds) had an occupancy rate of 84% (5 720).

In order to contribute to the University's strategy of improving student success rates and student retention, Student Affairs reviewed the Residence Admissions and Placement Policy, which was later approved by the Management Executive Committee.

**Table xx: Key student accommodation statistics**

	<b>Category</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
<b>On-campus accommodation</b>	Total number of beds available in on-campus residences	6 830 (excluding 143 beds of Robin Crest and 20 beds of Streatley residence, which were decommissioned for renovations and quarantining, respectively)
	Total number of beds occupied	5 720 beds
<b>Privately owned student accommodation</b>	Total number of beds available in POSA	25 932 beds
	Number of POSA beds occupied	About 9 196

The University continued with the strict application and implementation of the UJ standards and of the minimum norms and standards of the Department of Higher Education and Training for student accommodation, in both residences and privately owned student accommodation.





### **Strategic Objective Three: An international profile for global excellence and stature**

Student Affairs continued to contribute to Strategic Objective Three in terms of promoting the participation of international students in the activities of Student Affairs, and ensuring a supportive environment for an enriching student experience. A total of 20% of residence accommodation was reserved for international students. This has also been translated into a policy stance of the University. Furthermore, international students who could not go home because of the challenges of COVID-19 were allowed to remain in residence during the December holidays.

### **Strategic Objective Four: Enriching student-friendly learning and living experience**

Student Affairs continued with support for students throughout the student life cycle by providing an enriching student-friendly support environment. Interventions included establishing learning and living communities, mitigating student hunger, and providing financial assistance through the



SRC Trust Fund and the Student Funeral Assistance Programme. However, interventions and programmes addressing issues of risky student behaviour, safety and security, diversity and tolerance, good conduct and citizenship were largely transitioned to online. The University promoted the Student Charter and qualities of a UJ graduate in order to enhance responsible and ethical behaviour and conduct.



### ***Living and learning communities***

Notwithstanding the challenges imposed by COVID-19 and the resultant regulations and measures, Student Affairs promoted its activities through the Five-Pillar Model (comprising the Academic, Leadership, Community Engagement, Sport and Social pillars; Academic Excellence cuts across all the elements of the 5-Pillar Model.)

Living and learning communities in the UJ residences were supported through the Residence Academic Advising Programme. About 180 senior students were identified to help junior students, particularly first-year students in residences, with their academic work. The intervention contributed to the sound academic performance of residence students.



### ***Orientation of first-year students***

Student Affairs participated in the institutional orientation programme of first-year students (at UJ known as the First Year Seminar). Through Student Ethics and Discipline, and Student Life and Governance, Student Affairs impressed on the first year students the rules and regulations with which they had to comply, as well as tips for success on campus. These tips, rules and regulations were also uploaded onto the student portal (uLink).

During the First Year Seminar programme, Student Affairs made several presentations and conducted workshops for faculties, addressing the UJ Student Regulations for Student Discipline and the expected UJ undergraduate attributes.



### ***Extracurricular activities***

Student Affairs, together with other stakeholders, such as the SRC, house committees, IOHA, Protection Services and the Campus Clinic, coordinated several extracurricular activities and programmes on topics of safety and security and the prevention of risky student behaviour (RSB). To this end, the approved Charter for Student Wellness was applied in identifying the pillars of student wellness.

The Student Wellness Pillars were identified as Healthy Campus Management, Physical Activity and Sport, Nutrition, Prevention of Disease, Mental and Social Health, Prevention of Risky Student Behaviour, Environment, Sustainability and Social Responsibility.

The number of recognised student societies (which were mainly academic, political, religious and social in nature) stood at 75 across all



campuses. Registered members of the societies were 11 267 students.



### ***Student leadership development and support***

Student Affairs, in partnership with other stakeholders, facilitated a number of student leadership and development opportunities for student leaders. The student leadership ranged from the elected positions in the Student Representative Council (SRC), to the leadership positions in recognised student organisations.

The development opportunities available to student leaders were as follows:

- The induction of the 2021 house committees.
- The induction programme for the Student Representative Council.
- The induction programme for the executive committee members of student organisations.
- About 50 student leaders, including members of the SRC and house committees, enrolled for the UJ Young Leaders Development Programme facilitated by the Transformation Unit, the College of Business and Economics, and Student Affairs.

In addition, Student Affairs staff members continued to provide one-on-one coaching to a number of students. Members of the SRC were provided with guidance and advice on challenges in their respective academic and leadership roles, and with fee discussions. The SRC was assisted in writing reports for the University Council.







### ***Student discipline***

Student Affairs promoted the ethos of responsible and accountable student behaviour through the management of the student discipline process; 458 cases were dealt with in 2021. In the first quarter, the majority of cases were of academic dishonesty. There were 388 cases of academic transgressions, categorised either as plagiarism or as providing and/or receiving unauthorised assistance during assessments. A total of 69 cases were in relation to violations of the University measures to enhance compliance with the COVID-19 regulations, while one case was of assault. The academic cases were dealt with in close collaboration with the faculties and the college. Providing and/or receiving unauthorised assistance during assessments involved interactive website applications like Chegg.com, writing assessments in groups and having access to a leaked examination memorandum.



### ***Student welfare and support***

Student Affairs, in partnership with the School of Tourism and Hospitality, coordinated the provision of meal packs to students who had been identified as not being able to afford daily meals. There were 3 022 students benefiting from the Student Meal Assistance Programme. In addition, Student Affairs, in partnership with Tiger Brands, provided monthly meal packs to a further 500 identified students. In partnership with some of the privately owned student accommodation owners, Student Affairs was able to provide free student accommodation (15 beds) to students who could not afford accommodation. This intervention was intended as temporary assistance to the identified students until they were able to secure accommodation for themselves. Student Affairs assisted qualifying students with disabilities with caregivers, and also had a system of managing student incidents to provide support to the affected. The incidents ranged from attempted suicides to natural and unnatural deaths of students. Student Affairs provided support to the affected students and their friends on campus and to the families of the students, where necessary. Most of the incidents were resolved in collaboration with Protection Services, Campus Health, and PsyCaD.



Student Affairs put in place measures to support student compliance with COVID-19 regulations. During the violent protests and looting experienced in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, Student Affairs provided meal packs to an additional 108 students who were affected by the protests.



### ***Cultural activities***

A number of student organisations that are assisted by Student Affairs, organised student cultural activities, such as the traditional First Years Concert, Residence Song Battle and Sing-It-Out competitions.



### ***Student governance***

The elections for the 2022 SRC, which for the second time at UJ were electronic elections, took place from 4 to 6 October 2021. However, the elected SRC was scheduled to start its term of office from 1 January 2022, and the 2021 SRC remained in office until 31 December 2021. The elections for the leadership structures of other student organisations and structures, such as house committees, were conducted in October/November 2021 under the leadership and coordination of Student Affairs. The voter turnout improved by 3% from 16% to 19%, while the average national SRC voter turnout was 18%.





## **Strategic Objective Five: National and global reputation management**

Plans to promote the participation of student leaders and students in activities to enhance the good reputation of the University were unfortunately affected by the nationwide lockdown. These included the Africa-by-Bus initiative and planned international visits.

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT**

Student organisations and house committees mobilised students to participate in a range of outreach projects, such as donating food and clothing, providing toiletries to children from orphanages, renovating and painting homes, and providing learning materials to pupils in the surrounding schools. This was undertaken while complying with the COVID-19 regulations.





## **Stakeholder engagement**

### ***Internal partnerships***

Student Affairs continued to partner with University Relations, UJ Sport, UJ Arts and Culture, the Division for Internationalisation, Occupational Health and Safety, Facilities Management, Protection Services, Academic Development and Support, the Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development (PsyCaD), the Institutional Office for HIV/AIDS and the Campus Health Clinics. Partnerships with the School of Tourism and Hospitality and Tiger Brands ensured that deserving students were provided with meals.

### ***External partnerships***

Student Affairs continued its partnerships with the City of Johannesburg Urban Development Subdivision, with surrounding Johannesburg communities, such as Auckland Park, Rossmore, Melville and Brixton, the City of Johannesburg Ward 69 Councillor, the South African Police Services (SAPS) and the various accredited buildings in the privately owned student accommodation. These partnerships focused mainly on the privately owned student accommodation, as well as on ensuring that UJ students were safe and secure in and around the campuses.

## **CHALLENGES**

Student Affairs faced the following challenges in 2021:

- The SRC, while reasonably available to undertake its role, could not provide leadership to the desired levels as it had to adjust its programmes to accommodate the institutional initiatives dealing with the challenges of COVID-19.
- A total of 15 student deaths, of which two were suicides while the rest were due to natural causes.
- Student distress remained a serious challenge.
- Academic dishonesty cases during the implementation of online teaching and learning.
- Incidents of gender-based violence, including assaults and rape, even though not in high numbers, were very concerning. Student Affairs, in partnership with Protection Services, Transformation, PsyCaD and the local police, put in place measures to deal with such in both a preventative and responsive manner.

## **CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD**

The infusion of the Fourth Industrial Revolution into a number of Student Affairs initiatives and the student leadership processes was progressively realised, e.g. automation of processes, and conducting effective online meetings and training. Even though the voter turnout for the SRC elections during the second electronic election was only 19%, the benefits of this approach far exceeded the disadvantages.

Student Affairs, in partnership with students, will continue exploring opportunities for an outstanding and preferred student experience. The following nine priorities remain as the defining factors and drivers for Student Affairs:

- Student stability and relations
- Provision of student accommodation
- Ethical and servant leadership
- Advocacy for student safety and security
- Student wellness
- Student development and support
- Policy development and review
- Staff capacity building.