

Undergraduate Student Statement – 25 Sep. 16

Dear students and staff,

The undergraduate (UG) student body of the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) would like to inform fellow students and staff about the happenings of the past week.

Account of events

Thursday 15 September 2016

Protest began under the banner #BringBackOurCadres when UCT management refused to drop charges related to protest action by students and to allow them registration into UCT. These protests formed the beginning of UCT's participation in the national #FeesMustFall movement.

The HSSC and student leadership were approached by the Deanery at the start of the broader UCT shutdown. At this meeting, it was discussed whether the health sciences Faculty should shut down alongside the rest of the university. The Deanery saw no need to do so at this point despite being advised to do so.

Friday 16 September 2016

UCT remained shut down and private security was deployed onto upper campus (estimated cost R1 million per month)

The Health Sciences Faculty decided to, along with the rest of the university, suspend operations from Friday afternoon.

Monday, 19 September

Despite the university closure, health sciences students who wished to participate in the protest were barred from doing so under the guise of clinical responsibilities. All student activities occur within the context of care being provided by paid health professionals who are responsible for patient care.

Clinical students developed a list of student demands specific to the Health Sciences Faculty to be delivered to the Deanery the following day (see attached demands).

Tuesday 20/09/2016

On Tuesday morning, Health Science students shut down the campus in solidarity with the upper campus shutdown as well as to highlight our own demands.

The student demands specific to Health Sciences were given to the Deanery, who committed to meaningfully answering them by Thursday, 22 September 2016, with clear plans for their implementation - **how and when and with details of who would be accountable.**

Wednesday 21/09/2016

All students and staff were invited to a Dean's forum focussed on the protest action of the week. Prior to the forum, students met to decide whether or not to take part in the Deanery-proposed picket at parliament the following day. It was decided that this decision would be taken after hearing more about the picket from the Deanery. Students and staff were invited to make additions to the memorandum presented as it lacked clarity and did not seem to align with the movement's goal for

free decolonised higher education. Following the forum, we, as students, discussed the non-negotiable additions to be made before we could express our support. The demands were rejected by the Deanery. In response the Health Science student movement decided to withdraw support for the picket at Parliament (see attached statement).

During the Dean's Open Forum, sentiments surrounding continued victimisation as well as a general call for increased accountability were raised by students as well as supportive staff members. The Deanery's responses to these sentiments were extremely vague and resulted in increased student disillusionment.

The Deanery reiterated that they would respond to the student demands by the following day (Thursday, 22 September 2016). However, at a meeting later on Wednesday, the Deanery, in the absence of Professor Mayosi, requested an extension on the deadline. At this meeting, the extension was not approved.

Thursday, 22/09/2016

On Thursday at the student Mass Meeting, a vote was taken on the extension asked for by the Deanery and it was decided that no extension would be granted. In informal, verbal communication later that day, three HSSC members communicated this decision to the three members of the Dean team who were present at the Wednesday evening meeting.

In order for the greater community to understand the decision that Health Science students took to neither take part, nor disrupt the picket, a press conference was called and took place on lower campus where a full statement was read out. Our position was supported by the rest of the student and worker movement present.

Despite Thursday being the deadline, no response was received and demands were not answered. In order to apply pressure for the demands to be met on the Friday, when all students could still attend the meeting, a decision was made to barricade the Faculty the following day. Communication was sent to the Postgraduate HSSC to ensure that any sensitive research was not compromised by the barricade (see attached email).

Friday, 23/09/2016

Following our decision from the previous day to fully shutdown the Faculty, around 30 students barricaded most entrances to the Faculty except the main and link bridge entrances. Certain staff members **entered** the building to fulfil the essential services which run from the Health Sciences Campus.

The Dean and Deputy Dean of Undergraduate Education and Operations addressed the group of students demonstrating outside campus. The Deanery was assured essential staff were allowed in and people were allowed free exit from the Faculty premises. After much discussion, an option was brought forward that the barricade would be completely collapsed should the Deanery agree to a public meeting at 10.30am (a time stipulated by the Deanery) with all students. An email was sent (attached) to the Dean and Deputy Deans stating this position. Shortly after sending this email, after the Dean and Deputy Dean had left, private security in a Ford Ranger proceeded to try to gain entrance and in the process drove through students with no warning or intent to avoid them. Shortly thereafter a Quantum bus also gained access in the same manner. As these vehicles hurtled into the crowd, it became apparent to us that our safety came secondary to the Faculty's convenience of access. This was happening as students were dispersing, removing barricades and neither the Dean nor Deputy Dean had provided any notification that they had called on private security.

A group of traumatised students went to report the incident to the Dean who admitted to calling outside help without any warning to the peaceful group of protestors. Undoubtedly, disproportionate force was used in this instance. Note that the presence of private security, as well as the lack of warning to protestors was completely withheld in the subsequent statement from the Deanery; a further act of bad faith.

The private security company called on is Vetus Schola (“old-school”), and is contracted by UCT in order to protect property. For more information on this company that hires, among others, ex-military that are not regulated in the same way as the SAPS, please see the following link: <http://www.vetuschola.co.za/high-risk-operations/strike-handling.html>.

The Deanery proceeded to keep over 200 health sciences students waiting for 45 minutes for them to arrive at the previously negotiated meeting. Democratically elected student representatives sat at the head table with members of the HSSC as well as Deanery. The Deanery then gave a draft of some of their responses to our demands, proceeding systematically through each one. The majority of the responses were vague and rendered students unable to hold any members of Faculty accountable.

The only satisfactory response was with regards to a fee breakdown of each of the individual courses. The Deputy Dean of Health Services committed to providing a detailed report-back on Friday, 30 September 2016, on this specific issue. It was agreed to break for lunch and to reconvene at 2pm. The meeting resumed around 3pm with the Deanery explaining that they were in a meeting with staff and the Vice Chancellor during the intermission.

When the Deanery returned, it was stated that the Deputy Dean of Undergraduate Education and Operations was feeling ill and unable to attend. Students were disgruntled by her absence, despite the presence of a replacement due to the Deputy Dean’s integral role in answering the demands. A request was made that she be contacted to return, and this request was rejected.

The students also noted at this time that the private security that had been called by the Deanery was *still* present on campus. The students requested once again that the private security be asked to leave campus, as there was no threat to property or persons. It is imperative to note that requests were made before and during the meeting for private security to be dismissed. At the same time, students felt intentionally intimidated by their presence at every entrance and their filming of students walking into and around campus. This was especially unnecessary given that all students that had previously protested were attending the meeting at this time and all barricades had been collapsed hours earlier.

Despite this, the Deanery refused to ask private security to leave the campus. They remained adamant regarding the issue of security. They refused to engage further on the student demands that were to be addressed after the intermission, stating that they would ‘not be subjected to this inquisition’ and promptly walked out of the meeting to the dismay of the hundreds of students who had waited for them.

Following the abrupt departure of the Deanery, students reconvened to plan a way forward. The Deanery sent two representatives back to the venue. They asked to meet privately with *only* three members of the HSSC despite numerous requests for direct and transparent communication with the entire assembled student body. The Deanery’s request was rejected and their representatives were respectfully asked to leave. After extensive student discussion, it was decided that we would not disperse until the Deanery provided concrete responses to our demands in a respectful manner,

without the threat of private security on the premises. As a result, it was decided that the Dean's Suite (now known to students as Hamilton Naki Suite) would be occupied, however staff working in the offices would not be prevented from exiting with an explicit assurance that no harm would befall them.

The location of the occupation is symbolic due to the power it contains and the decisions that are made within this space. This space represents students' longstanding feelings of oppression, silencing, fear and exclusion. The occupation has given health sciences students the opportunity to claim back the space. Again we emphasise that the Deanery were free to leave at any point and this was communicated to them both verbally and via email. Despite this, they locked themselves inside the offices for over an hour while students sang peacefully outside. When they eventually left, they did so without any violence or intimidation from students. Before leaving the premises, the Deanery addressed the students occupying the suite. When asked about the Deanery's stance regarding private security, no commitment, was given that private security would not be called on again (as a result of Faculty student protest). Furthermore, no protocol was stipulated as to the circumstances under which the Deanery calls upon security. The Deanery apologised for leaving the meeting in the manner in which they had, stating that they had 'given lip-service in response to deep issues.'

#OccupyFHS