

# Enquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding Professor Bongani Mayosi's Tenure: Crucible for Senior Black Academic Staff?



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*This executive summary is a quick reference and an overview whose context and detailed explanation will be found in the Main Report. We therefore encourage any reader of the Executive Summary to read it together with the Main Report.*

1. The inquiry panel was established by a resolution of the Council of the University of Cape Town (UCT), taken on 10 September 2018. It was established in the aftermath of Professor Bongani Mayosi's death by suicide on 27 July 2018 while he was Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at UCT. The Council had been approached by various stakeholders of the University, including the Mayosi family, student representatives and staff formations, with a call for an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding his death. A task team constituted by the Council conducted a preliminary investigation into the matter and resolved to appoint a panel, whose terms of reference are presented below, to conduct an inquiry.

2. The Terms of Reference were:

The panel will undertake its review in two stages. The first stage will be confidential to the Mayosi and Khumalo family. The second stage will not be confidential.

## **Stage 1**

- The panel will establish a factual record and timeline of events from the point at which Professor Mayosi was appointed Dean to the time of his passing.

- In establishing the aforementioned record and timeline, the panel's review will include (a) Professor Mayosi's induction as Dean, (b) support provided to him, (c) his reported subsequent resignation as Dean and the reported non-acceptance thereof, and (d) the reported proposal to appoint him as a scholar to lead a Centre of Excellence at UCT.

### **Stage 2**

- The panel will review the systems for management of senior leaders, induction processes and institutional support for those in leadership positions, with a particular focus on black leaders at the university, and associated institutional culture factors.
  - The panel's review will seek to identify those factors that provide opportunities to inform institutional interventions to assist the university in the future.
- 3.** From the outset, the panel understood the enormity, sensitivity and complexity of the task. The panel met with the family to brief them on the task, and to solicit their understanding on the confidentiality element of the terms of reference, especially what it would mean to them in practical terms. The family's guidance was very helpful in this respect. A simple look at the terms in which the demand for an inquiry were couched revealed the depth of feeling among the stakeholders. This was confirmed by the interviews that the panel conducted. These feelings ranged from a wish that Professor Mayosi's passing should occasion a process of deep introspection by the university as to its institutional culture and how it treated black staff in particular, to concerns by some that student protests had gotten out of hand and caused a great deal of trauma, to worries by the students themselves that they had been unduly blamed in this matter. On the other side of the fence, there were some strong views expressed that the inquiry

was “a waste of time and money” set up primarily to pander to those who wished to see the university being blamed for everything that happened. There were even a few, notably few, voices which objected to the appointment of a panel in the case of Professor Mayosi’s suicide, when the suicide of a long-serving administrator in the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), albeit retired, was never probed. This clearly indicated to the panel the diverse and contradictory views of the university community on the utility of this task.

4. This executive summary presents an overview of developments surrounding the appointment and tenure of Professor Mayosi as the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, up to his tragic passing and the reactions to it. The summary is organized into distinct and yet inter-related topics that seek to cover various points regarding Professor Mayosi’s overall experiences as a dean, the challenges he encountered, and the manner in which the university handled these. The topics addressed below represent a complex set of developments which had a cumulative and sometimes corrosive impact on Professor Mayosi and various sections of the university community, spilling over to the broader society once the tragic passing of Professor Mayosi was public knowledge. It is worth noting that even though the prominent context of Professor Mayosi’s tenure was the fact that it coincided with the tension-riddled period of the student protests, this, in many instances illuminated fault lines and weaknesses within the university systems and group dynamics including the vexing and often elusive issue of transformation. These topics are not arranged in any order of importance but are an attempt to sequence them according to the evolution of events:

**5. Professor Mayosi's Rise to the Deanship and Faculty Dynamics.**

By many accounts, Professor Mayosi's star was in the ascendant as Head of the Department of Medicine, when the position of Dean became vacant. It came as no surprise when some colleagues approached him to apply for the position. Information received by the panel was that he overcame an initial reluctance to throw his hat in the ring and had become an enthusiastic candidate by the time he submitted his application. People in the faculty still speak of the powerful presentation he delivered to his colleagues during the interview process. When the application was successful, he arranged to take part of his sabbatical leave, in order to study a management course at the Harvard Business School and to visit Medical Faculties at other institutions abroad as part of his preparation for the task. Reports on his return to the faculty confirm this commitment and enthusiasm. He took office at the beginning of September 2016. A few days after his assumption of duty the #FeesMustFall protests erupted in the Faculty of Health Sciences, which hitherto had been largely spared the turbulence that was raging around the university and countrywide. The panel has concluded that this baptism by fire had a profound impact on Professor Mayosi's tenure as Dean. Veering visibly towards sympathy with the students' cause, he was to suffer criticism from all sides for some of his decisions: from some faculty colleagues for not stamping down on the unrest; from some on his executive team for sometimes going against collective decisions and being perceived as bowing to student pressure; and from some students themselves, for not solving their problems quickly enough. The pressure on Professor Mayosi became relentless and, as reported to the panel by many interviewees, the impact of the stressful circumstances started to affect his work negatively.

**6. Student Protests and their Impact on Professor Mayosi and the Faculty.**

The panel had no hesitation in concluding, from the testimony presented, that the eruption of the #FeesMustFall protests a few days after Professor Mayosi took up his post as Dean was the single most influential factor directly and indirectly affecting his Deanship. He was not granted a chance to settle down to try out the plans for the faculty that he had so enthusiastically envisioned during his sabbatical and immediately upon his return. In Chapter 3 the panel draws from a range of interviews with Professor Mayosi's colleagues, administrative staff, and students to show how the energy and enthusiasm he brought with his vision was soon dimmed by the relentless and sometimes aggressive stance of the student protesters. From the interviews with Professor Mayosi's colleagues, the panel found that the sometimes disrespectful manner in which the FHS students' protest was conducted, and instigation of students' action by some of his colleagues, caused him a lot of distress. The level of distress Professor Mayosi experienced is captured in his own handwritten notes shared with the panel in which he states that he was "deeply affected by the trauma of the period." The interviews showed that while students respected Professor Mayosi and acknowledged the role that he played in supporting black students, the urgency with which they wanted him to attend to the long-standing grievances that had been unaddressed in the FHS led to actions that went beyond the boundaries of respectful behaviour. The panel found that Professor Mayosi often faced situations where his faculty had to make hard choices and difficult decisions, such as support of the students' march to Bremner, postponement of examinations and declaration of a mini-semester. These decisions were met with hostile reactions which were directed at him as dean by some members of management, students and academic staff alike, leading Professor Mayosi increasingly to feel a sense of isolation. There can be no doubt that his leadership was challenged by these experiences.

**7. Issues of Mental Health.**

The panel was alive to the mental health debates in institutions of higher learning in South Africa, a focus that was further reinforced by the IRTC report of 2018 and the FHS's Mental Health Working Group (MHWG) findings of April 2019. These reports highlighted, in addition to student unrest, the broader effects of racism, discrimination and the slow pace of transformation on the mental wellbeing of campus communities. The panel noted the tendency of these debates to result in some measure of provision to address mental health among students, and not so much for staff, apart from the emphasis on coaching services. At UCT, what struck the panel was the time that it took for Professor Mayosi's mental health struggles to reach those in authority. According to members of the family, there were no detectable signs of any psychiatric problems prior to Professor Mayosi's ascension to the deanship. Many interviewees spoke of specific incidents during which they noted Professor Mayosi's behavior as being changed from that of the person they knew. Others were privy to actual episodes of unwellness, detected either at the faculty or on travels abroad. Certainly, the episodes were enough to have Professor Mayosi granted sick leave on two occasions. Noting these reports, the panel struggled to find answers as to why a deterioration that was evident to many people was not reported or arrested in time, either by those close to Professor Mayosi or by officialdom. Even more concerning for the panel is the fact that this lack of awareness led to Professor Mayosi having to operate in an atmosphere where the demands on him were on the basis of "business as usual", while his capacity was impaired. It is for this reason that the panel couches the finding on this aspect of the investigation in the following terms: [Findings 7 and 12]

**8. Attempted Resignation(s) and the Promise of Redeployment.**

This was yet another cluster of issues that were prominent in public



discourse in the aftermath of Professor Mayosi's passing. The two are linked because the very same pressures that led to Professor Mayosi's resignation from the deanship would possibly have been alleviated if the offered redeployment to a senior research post had succeeded. The panel was told that the story doing the rounds was that there were at least two attempted resignations by Professor Mayosi, which were turned down by the university. The allegation had been seen on social media and had been mentioned in speeches. The underlying criticism of the university implicit in this allegation was not lost on the panel: this allegation, if proven, would be a damaging indictment of insensitivity on the part of the institution. The panel thus took special care to sift through the available evidence.

The resignation most clearly backed by the evidence was Professor Mayosi's letter of 3 November 2017 to the VC, Max Price, which was accompanied by two more documents that helped to cast more light on the incident. Evidence presented to the panel was that that particular resignation had not been refused, but rather that Professor Mayosi was persuaded to withdraw it, after mechanisms to ease his burdens were promised. The panel was presented with minimal evidence that shows that some attempts were made to ease his burdens, but it remains unclear whether these attempts made any substantial difference. In the panel's assessment, these attempts seem to have borne little or no fruit. As to speculation that he might have been coerced into withdrawing his resignation, the panel has found no formal evidence of this. Other possible resignation attempts are matters of reported conversations with Professor Mayosi by close friends and associates, some of which the panel found to be corroborated and credible. There is no formal documentation attesting to these.

The issue of the proposed-then-withdrawn offer of a research post under the Pro Vice-Chancellor title also exercised the collective



mind of the panel considerably. It was another of those occasions where it was necessary to name names, since there was executive accountability involved. Chapter 5 describes in close detail, sourced mainly from the Vice-Chancellor, the unfolding of events since the notion was mooted that Professor Mayosi could steer a substantial research project into diseases of poverty, which would cut across disciplines and across state borders, since it was conceived as a continent-wide endeavour. The concept played to Professor Mayosi's strengths as a scholar of high academic and research profile nationally, continentally and globally. The VC spearheaded the effort, consulting widely within and outside UCT before broaching the subject to Professor Mayosi. From the accounts of interviewees, he embraced the plan, to the extent of participating in a meeting of the Dean's Advisory Committee and heads of department at which the VC unveiled the project and confirming in his speech that he was ready to take on the challenge. The plan unravelled when, in a special faculty board meeting presumably called to announce Mayosi as PVC, the VC did not make the expected announcement. In the panel's view, the effects on Professor Mayosi must have been devastating: [Finding 11]

### **9. University's Handling of the News of Prof Mayosi's Passing**

After a review of the public materials relating to the passing of Professor Mayosi, including communications of the tragedy in internal and external outlets, the panel expresses dissatisfaction with the way that the university executive dealt with the matter. Tracing official communications from the very first message announcing Professor Mayosi's death, the panel finds that the earlier communications were couched sensitively and in measured tones, as were the responses of the family. The problems began when the interactive media came into the picture, with a particular attempt by the Vice-Chancellor to explain an earlier statement which had been widely construed as

placing the blame for Mayosi's death on the protesters, appearing to inflame emotions even further. There followed a series of corrosive exchanges in social media platforms which involved a great deal of finger-pointing. The conclusions of the panel are summed up the following finding, emphasising that crisis communication of such a delicate matter should have been handled differently. [Finding 1]

### **10. UCT's Institutional Culture and its Impact on Black Staff**

In conclusion the panel addresses the elusive issue of institutional culture, by first attempting to settle on a working definition of the label, and then proceeding to tease out some of the more pressing issues, as perceived mostly by black staff in senior positions. Areas of concern that emerged from testimony by the panel's interviewees included five issues that recurred throughout the various conversations. These were:

- performance – the problem here appeared to be the persistent perception that in these formal assessments black staff invariably scored below their white counterparts, and were then offered 'coaching' which many experienced as patronizing or, at worst, not honestly intended.
- informal networks – these were described as the 'corridor talk' that influences decision-making at UCT, difficult to detect and therefore difficult to counter.
- effects of austerity cuts – though specific to a particular era, this was experienced in certain black leadership quarters
- as an example of unequal bargaining power when it came to hard decisions such as which programmes should be cut or retained. Some interviewees felt that the decisions went along racial lines.
- contradictory expectations on black leaders – captured in Finding 6, this aspect of the life of senior black staff came through clearly for the panel from the mouths of the interviewees concerned, even though it appears to be difficult to prove scientifically.

- identity politics – the panel observed that, adding to the tensions around the black-white mix in the university community, were the fault-lines that sometimes existed internally amongst members of each of these broad designations, showing that, by and large black staff in particular should not be seen as a monolithic group.
- The panel’s findings on institutional culture appear as Findings 2, 6, 10 and 15.

### **11. Recommendations.**

In the exercise of its mandate, the panel has set out a list of recommendations matching the key findings mentioned above, both in respect of Professor Mayosi as a respected member of the university community during his illustrious life, and in respect of lessons learnt from his passing about how to create the inclusive university that many have dreamed of over the years. Key amongst the former set of recommendations would be Recommendations 4 and 6; the lessons learnt are represented by Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the aftermath of the passing of Professor Bongani Mayosi, various stakeholders approached the Council of the University of Cape Town (UCT) with a call for an inquiry to be instituted into the circumstances surrounding his death. These stakeholders included the Mayosi and Khumalo families, student representatives and staff formations. In the words of the UCT Black Academic Caucus (BAC) and concerned staff, contained in a statement dated 2 August 2018, the Council was requested to “set up an inquiry that will make a thorough investigation of the circumstances leading to Professor Mayosi’s decision to terminate his life”.

The inquiry panel was established by a resolution of the UCT Council taken on 10 September 2018, with the following Terms of Reference:

The panel will undertake its review in two stages. The first stage will be confidential to the Mayosi and Khumalo family. The second stage will not be confidential.

### Stage 1

- 1.1 The panel will establish a factual record and timeline of events from the point at which Professor Mayosi was appointed Dean to the time of his passing.
- 1.2 In establishing the aforementioned record and timeline, the panel’s review will include (a) Professor Mayosi’s induction as Dean, (b)

support provided to him, (c) his reported subsequent resignation as Dean and the reported non-acceptance thereof, and (d) the reported proposal to appoint him as a scholar to lead a Centre of Excellence at UCT.

### **Stage 2**

- 2.1 The panel will review the systems for management of senior leaders, induction processes and institutional support for those in leadership positions, with a particular focus on black leaders at the university, and associated institutional culture factors.
- 2.2 The panel's review will seek to identify those factors that provide opportunities to inform institutional interventions to assist the university in the future.

### **Panel Membership**

Members appointed to the panel were (in alphabetical order) Dr Somadoda Fikeni, Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Emeritus Professor Thandabantu Nhlapo and Ms Nomfundo Walaza. At the first meeting of the panel, Professor Nhlapo was confirmed as chair and convenor, as well as the panel's spokesperson. The letter of appointment was received by the members on 23 January 2019, and the announcement of the panel to the general public was made on 12 February 2019. The services of Mr Mubeen Gaibie from the Registrar's Office were made available as administrative support for the panel's work. A few weeks into the job, Mr Gaibie resigned from UCT, and Mr James Sharpe was appointed in his place.

### **Background**

From the outset, the panel understood the enormity, sensitivity and complexity of the task. A simple look at the terms in which the demand

for an inquiry were couched revealed the depth of feeling among the stakeholders. This was confirmed by the interviews that the panel conducted. These feelings ranged from a wish that Professor Mayosi's passing should occasion a process of deep introspection by the university as to its institutional culture and how it treated black staff, to concerns by some that student protests had gotten out of hand, to worries by the students themselves that they had been unduly demonised in this matter. On the other side of the fence, there were some strong views expressed that the inquiry was "a waste of time and money" set up primarily to pander to those who wished to see the university being blamed for everything that happened. There were a few even some who objected to the appointment of a panel in the case of Professor Mayosi's suicide, when the suicide of a long-serving administrator in the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), albeit retired, was never probed.

It was thus not lost on the panel that expectations around its report would not only be high, but would be varied according to these deep feelings across the different groupings. For this reason, the panel spent a considerable amount of time debating the Terms of Reference and developing an interpretation that would inform its work. This task was guided by at least three sources: an early meeting with the Mayosi and Khumalo families; the confidential report of Council's Ad Hoc Committee (including the handover meeting at which the committee explained its recommendations to the panel); and the statement submitted by the Concerned Staff and UCT Black Academic Caucus group. These views and submissions were not being endorsed in any way by the panel; they were taken as useful signposts in understanding the reaction by the university community to Professor Mayosi's tragic death, and the expectations around any review of the tragedy that might be instituted.

The panel construed the Terms of Reference as set out below:

- Establishing a factual record and timeline of events would necessitate



a review of events which took place before the deanship appointment, including the earlier student protests, and a brief look at Professor Mayosi's period as head of the Department of Medicine. In other words, the panel's information collection and analysis would not be confined to "the point at which Professor Mayosi was appointed dean".

- The instruction to examine the issues of induction, support, resignation and the proposed Centre for Excellence was straightforward enough and would be pursued as set out in the Terms of Reference.
- To review the systems for the management of senior leaders, especially black leaders, would require another look at induction processes and at institutional support as well as UCT's institutional culture in general.
- At the end the panel would need to make recommendations as to the factors emerging from the inquiry that could be used to improve UCT's institutional culture.
- All these tasks overlapped significantly and could perhaps best be viewed as involving the pursuit of Stage 1 (relating specifically to Professor Mayosi) while keeping Stage 2 (relating to UCT as a whole) firmly in mind at all times.
- Although the Terms of Reference mention the "Mayosi and Khumalo family", the panel's interaction with the family established that they were comfortable with "Mayosi"

Having determined for itself what Council's mandate was and how it should be executed, the panel came to the conclusion that the inquiry was NOT about establishing why Professor Mayosi took his own life, or in any way attributing causes to his untimely passing. This decision by the panel was in line with the views of the Mayosi and Khumalo families as recorded in the report of Council's Ad Hoc Committee and as expressed by the family during the first meeting with panel. Simply put, there were confidential matters that were covered legally by doctor-patient privilege, delving into which would constitute an invasion of privacy. The

report is thus not the outcome of a forensic investigation into Professor Mayosi's death, but aims to be a compendium and analysis of factors that were at play during his time as dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences. In line with this approach, no attempt was made to seek any medical information or to contact any practitioners who had had a professional relationship with Professor Mayosi.

It is also important to clarify that the panel will inevitably speak of "findings" in this report, with the understanding that this does not mean that the facts in question were established beyond reasonable doubt. The panel is not a court of law and the inquiry was not conducted as a trial. A finding, in this report, means that the four panellists (bringing as they do diverse attributes of character, experience, skills and learning to the task) are satisfied that things happened as described or that information supplied represents a genuine feeling, recollection, perception or opinion of the party or parties concerned. Many times the panel accepted different versions of a particular incident or event, satisfied that where it was not material to establish the absolute truth, the mere existence of several differing perceptions and understandings of the same set of facts was itself an important indicator of the dynamics at play within UCT society. Needless to say, any consensus over what the panellists were hearing and seeing, when it occurred, drew significantly from their own experiences as South Africans.

### **Some Methodological Considerations (Methodology)**

In planning the investigation, the panel had to address the critical question: What kinds of data were required in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the circumstances around Professor Mayosi as dean, in a way that would offer useful insights from which lessons can be drawn? Interviews with different individuals including UCT management, administrative and academic employees and colleagues of Professor

Mayosi, and students, were the primary form of data collection. Given the wide-ranging dimensions on which the panel was required to conduct the investigation, additional sources of documentary data, such as reports from the Human Resources department, performance appraisals by Professor Mayosi's line managers, leave forms et cetera, were included. The panel was conscious that given UCT's status within the higher education sector, and given Professor Mayosi's own profile, the report should not only be a document for review by UCT and the Mayosi family, but should also be relevant for other institutions facing transformation challenges, as well as a wider audience of academics and policymakers involved in both scholarly and popular debates about mental health issues and about issues of transformation. The methodology adopted by the panel reflects this broader perspective to the investigation.

It was decided that the panel should work with stories from the interviewees about their experiences of their relationship with Professor Mayosi at various stages of his leadership, including the period since his appointment as dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences. From his colleagues, the panel thought it would be important to obtain information regarding views about Professor Mayosi as a person, his leadership style, and how he handled the crisis that emerged around the outbreak of the Fees Must Fall protests. The perceptions of students about Professor Mayosi's leadership and handling of the #FeesMustFall crisis were also canvassed, and their experiences of the UCT environment explored in order to understand what the prevailing conditions were at the Faculty of Health Sciences. Part of the review would include questions about how the students interacted with Professor Mayosi during the crisis to evaluate whether there was anything in their conduct that was relevant to the investigation, and especially to consider whether there was any evidence to suggest that students treated Professor Mayosi with disrespect.

The panel adopted a qualitative approach to the investigation -

“qualitative” in the general sense that the method entails developing a set of questions designed to elicit “stories” about the experiences of participants in the context of their relationship with Professor Mayosi as well as their observations of his behaviour. The evaluation is based on understanding what was said, how it was said, and various contextual issues such as emotions expressed in the telling of these stories. The qualitative research approach offers an opportunity for engaging with the finer details of subjective experience, capturing a level of depth of understanding in a way that allows for consideration of perceptions, feelings and meanings that the participants in the interviews construct to make sense of their experiences.

There was another reason for taking a qualitative approach to the investigation: Phase 2 of this report involves reflection on questions of institutional transformation, which implicitly implies social justice, broadly speaking. Current definitions of the qualitative approach to research have become more explicit about the social justice aspiration of qualitative research. The process of engaging with the data, it has been argued, turns the urgent social and political questions in this world “into a series of representations” that make what is going on visible in order “to transform the world”.

John Creswell in his book titled *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2012)<sup>1</sup> takes this point further and makes the advocacy and transformative perspective of qualitative research even more explicit. A report based on a qualitative approach, he explains, gives voice to the stories of the people interviewed, conveys the complexity of the problem and contributes to deeper knowledge about the issue and “a call for change”.

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<sup>1</sup> Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. New York: Pearson Publishing.

The panel wishes to emphasise that while the approach to this investigation is qualitative, this is in a more general sense in terms of the broad assumptions of a qualitative perspective to collecting data and an interpretive framework in evaluating the findings.

The panel decided on an open-ended approach to interviews, which allowed participants a level of flexibility in the structure of their responses according to what was pertinent for them and to raise important issues regarding their experiences. It also gave the panel an opportunity to probe deeper and to ask questions that became necessary when an interview took an unanticipated direction. An important aspect of this form of data collection is that one is able to capture nuance – such as in emphasis of voice or body language expressed in emotions or subtle movements at certain points in the interview which may provide context for reflection on, and interpretation of, complex feelings or subtle avoidances that are difficult to articulate, or even to acknowledge.

Following the more general qualitative approach adopted, the panel's interpretation of the data collected did not follow the iterative qualitative research process in terms of developing themes and organising the analysis around different forms of patterns emerging from the data sets. The sampling plan for collecting the data was purposive; all the people interviewed were selected in order to provide information about their experience of Professor Mayosi. The panel applied a “surface” approach to the analysis, organising the information collected in terms of response statements that relate to the questions presented to the interviewees and key points the panellists wished to probe and to pursue.

In order to address the dimensions specified by the UCT Council in the Terms of Reference for this investigation, the panel organised the open-ended questions for the interviews into four categories.

The first category of questions sought to gain an understanding of the context in which interviewees knew Professor Mayosi. The second set of questions had to do with a more specific description of events: What was happening around certain critical moments? The third category of questions focused on the participants' experiences of Professor Mayosi in action during the various events and crises, and also explored the participants' interactions with Professor Mayosi as individuals and as members of their groups. The final set of questions concerned the prevailing "institutional culture" at the Faculty of Health Sciences, both at the higher level of support for senior academic staff and at the everyday level of just how things work.

A report of this nature could not directly accommodate each and every voice, but content analysis and interpretation have assisted the panel to arrive at findings and recommendations as set out in the report. For ease of reference, some of the more important documents have been attached as annexures.

For each of these four areas of review, the panel requested participants to respond to a series of questions relevant to each dimension. When necessary, the panel asked follow-up questions and/or prompted the interviewees to say more to gain clarity about the meanings and motivations attached to certain statements.

Generally speaking, then, the panel proceeded in the following way:

- Documents were sourced from university departments and units, including Human Resources (HR), the Executive, the Communication and Marketing Department (CMD), and from some individuals. From HR and CMD in particular, the panel was assisted, respectively, with materials that threw light on contractual and performance issues, and with comprehensive compilations of references from print, electronic and social media.

- The documents were reviewed in detail to gain some understanding of events during the relevant period.
- An initial invitation list was generated from this exercise.
- The decision was taken to interview close working associates of Professor Mayosi (personal assistants, the deanery, the Dean's Advisory Committee and faculty) first, before engaging with his outer circle of colleagues and associates throughout the university.
- Requests and invitations to interview were sent out. Further invitations would be issued as the project unfolded, on the basis of names suggested by interviewees.
- A meeting with the Mayosi family was held on 8 April 2019, not for interview purposes but as a courtesy call to introduce the panel and to ventilate some issues regarding Stage 1 of the task and its characterisation as a confidential stage.
- The first round of interviews took place on 10-12 and 17-18 April 2019. Ten people were interviewed, eleven invitations having been extended. The conversations were qualitative engagements based on the semi-structured interview format.
- Each interviewee was led through a discussion of the confidentiality of the proceedings, electing whether to agree to an audio recording or not, and a refresher talk on the panel's Terms of Reference. Assurances were given that, by and large, the report would not mention interviewees by name, and that the recordings would be used purely to ensure the factual accuracy of the report and would be deleted immediately after its submission. After the first few interviews the panel revised its initial stance on non-attribution, electing instead to alert interviewees that it may become unavoidable to mention names, especially in the case of accountable senior executives and leaders or where a conclusion would make no sense without identifying the parties involved.
- The second round of interviews took place on 18-19, 21-22 and 27 May 2019. Eleven people were interviewed, from 19 invitations.



- The third round of interviews took place on 3 June 2019 – three interviews from six invitations.
- The fourth round of interviews took place on 7, 12, 15-17, 20, 25-28 and 30 August 2019 - twenty interviews from twenty invitations.
- The fifth round of interviews took place on 8 and 9 September 2019 – two interviews from two invitations).
- The sixth round took place on 4 November 2019 – one interview from one invitation.
- These rounds account for 46 interviews where the interviewees were being seen for the first time. The interviews were conducted by all four panellists in a minority of cases, three panellists in some cases, and two panellists in over 50% of the cases.
- In addition to these 46 engagements, there were 10 repeat interviews, mostly in October 2019, where one panellist would speak with the interviewee to pursue a point arising from the earlier engagement or from further information from other sources.
- There were two written submissions, one solicited and one unsolicited.
- In total there were thus 46 first interviews, 10 repeat interviews and two written submissions.
- The panel held several meetings at intervals to analyse the interviews conducted up to that point, to identify trends and to assess the import of the information coming through, in relation to both stages of the Terms of Reference.

### **Some Constraints that Confronted the Panel**

The panel did its work under several constraining factors, some minor and some quite substantial; some foreseeable and some quite unanticipated. The first category relates to the slow start to the panel's work. Some three months elapsed between the appointment of the panel and the time that arrangements were concluded for its first meeting. After that, the commencement of the work was slowed down a little further by

bureaucratic delays in the delivery of requested documents relevant to the panel's terms of reference. In cases where documentary information was requested but not available, the panel relied on its own research gathered from the interviewees. It is probably apt to mention here the panel's feeling that this report could have done with more student voices. The panellists are satisfied with the ones that they did get, and the quality of their insights and perspectives. But, all in all, they wish that it had been possible to hear from all of those who were initially invited, many of whom had understandably graduated in the interim and left UCT.

These factors by themselves perhaps do not merit dwelling on, especially when considered against the greatest constraint of all, which was the limited availability of the panel members. This significantly affected the time it took to complete the work. Council chose four South Africans who were deeply honoured to be entrusted with this national task, but whose diaries were something of a nightmare to synchronise given the nature of the duties and commitments of the panel members in their own professional fields. Many of these duties were, to all intents and purposes, set in stone, in that significant chunks of the year were irrevocably committed, annually. In the spaces left in between, room to manoeuvre was sometimes restricted by rapid and unpredictable developments in these professional fields.

In the interim status update to Council in June 2019 the panel conceded that it had not been possible to have all four panellists under one roof at any given time, or indeed in the same country, since the early days of their appointment. In the five months after their first formal meeting, prior commitments – most of them requiring international travel – prevented the exchange of ideas and energy that are only possible through face-to-face contact.

From the lofty intentions of fielding a full team of four panellists in interacting with key interviewees and no fewer than three members for other engagements, the panel had to bow to reality with the result that most conversations were conducted with only two or three panellists in attendance, and a notable few with just a single panel member. Recording the interviews proved to be the saving grace, because panellists were then able to make extensive use of both the transcripts and the voice recordings, which Mr Sharp meticulously filed and kept in a Dropbox account. The panellists were thus able to prepare for their briefing meetings, to good effect. For most of their communications, they relied on teleconferencing and using a WhatsApp group set up by the administration, and telephone and text messages. They accepted in their June update that this was not ideal.

Contrary to the panel's cautious optimism in that interim report, the situation did not improve. In the second half of the year the panel's operations were again bedevilled by pressured diaries. The best period for the work was in August when the panel cleared time to conduct 22 interviews which, being concerned mainly with members of the Executive, added immense insights into the matters being investigated. The panellists began to believe that they had garnered enough information to have a fair sense of the issues. But international travel and rapid developments in the professional fields of panel members continued to cast a shadow.

In the event, the work of the panel was caught up in the national lockdown necessitated by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. With that went any hope of achieving the interactive sessions planned to finalise the work, but the panel was able to engage successfully through virtual meetings to continue with the work. The same circumstances led to the submission of a document that had not had the benefit of a second and final editing.

### **The IRTC Report**

The Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission (IRTC) began its work in February 2018 after an agreement was reached between the UCT Executive and student formations in the wake of the protests of 2015 and 2016. They were given a mandate that was both wide and specific: wide in the sense that they had leeway to interpret their Terms of Reference creatively within the requirements of the task; specific because the issues that were on the table during the negotiation and signing of the agreement were quite clear – Shackville, amnesty, institutional culture, transformation etc. Their final report was thus necessarily focused on these concerns.

The IRTC Report is mentioned here because the Ad Hoc Committee of Council, in its report, reminded Council that it had already approved a process with the specific brief of making recommendations on the institutional culture at UCT, and that this process was still under way. The committee advised that it would be inappropriate to recommend a parallel process, and that the work of the IRTC should “at best ... feed into the review process to the extent that issues of institutional culture are pertinently raised during the review process”. The panel is grateful for this inclusion since it makes it clear that overlap should be avoided and that the panel mandate around the issue of Professor Mayosi’s passing should be the starting point. Any issues of institutional culture that arise from this review should take into consideration similar ground already traversed by the IRTC.

The panel was thus in a position to benefit from the work of the IRTC, especially in matters pertinent to its own review such as the student protests, issues of mental illness and questions of transformation. This report thus occasionally refers to the IRTC Report where appropriate, whether to support a position taken in that report or in any other way, to draw from it.

### **Acknowledgements**

The panel wishes to put on record its sincere gratitude to all the people who agreed to be interviewed, or to submit materials. The ethical and emotional conflicts besetting some of the interviewees were not lost on the panel. Colleagues and students of Professor Mayosi, and others, freely spoke of their struggling, upon receipt of the panel's invitation, with the prospect of reliving some of the harrowing experiences of the turbulent times in the faculty, or of reconstructing the journey they travelled with Professor Mayosi which, in many cases, inevitably led to their questioning whether there was anything that they could have done to avert the tragedy. It is to their lasting credit that many decided to avail themselves to the panel in any case.

The panel was even more touched by the fact that, without fail, all of those who conceded to these initial internal conflicts also made it clear that their presence in front of the panel was due to their deep affection and respect for Bongani Mayosi and their wish to contribute in some way to the lessons to be learnt from his untimely death. It is in understanding these deep personal circumstances and sentiments that the panel extends its thanks also to those invitees who, eventually, were not able to make themselves available: They were very few, and the panel wishes to acknowledge their reservations as perfectly legitimate.

The panel also extends its expressions of gratitude to the Registrar and the staff in the Registrar's Office and in other departments in the university who worked hard to make the panel's work easier by providing help and materials and, in particular, making travel arrangements, venue bookings and generally rolling out administrative support of a high standard.



## CHAPTER 2

### DEANSHIP: AN OVERVIEW

#### Background and Context

The primary focus of this chapter is on the circumstances surrounding Professor Mayosi's rise to deanship of the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) in 2015 as well as on the relational and governance dynamics once he had assumed office, with particular emphasis on key events which defined his tenure. Brief reference to his headship of the Department of Medicine within the same faculty is also made to provide a comparative context towards an understanding of his deanship which was relatively short. All this is prefaced with an overview of the architecture and structure as well as the significance of this faculty within UCT. This will assist with an appreciation of what the deans of this faculty have to deal with even during a normal period without protests or political contestations, which were to become a dominant feature of Professor Mayosi's tenure as dean.

#### Relative Size and Complexity of the Faculty of Health Sciences

University reports and information extracted from the interviews with staff members and leadership of the university all indicated the size, complexity and significance of FHS within the university. This is the largest faculty in terms of its number of staff and the funds it attracts. A large number of its professors are members of Senate, constituting the largest proportion of this statutory body which is charged with overseeing the academic enterprise of the university. It is reported

that the faculty has consistently attracted the largest proportion of the university's external research funding, with this funding increasing progressively over the years. The faculty also boasts the largest number of National Research Foundation (NRF) rated researchers, relative to other institutions, as well as funded South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) research chairs. Academics from the faculty are also responsible for a high proportion of total university publications, which generate significant subsidy income. Provide data and illustrations to reinforce this point.

UCT's *Research and Innovation Highlights* report for 2017–2018 records a significant number of subjects from the faculty listed in the top 100 in several global rankings, with many being ranked as leaders on the continent. These include the “clinical, pre-clinical and health subjects” category which was ranked as number one in Africa and 70th in the world in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. Other FHS subjects ranked in the top 100 globally were immunology, microbiology, social sciences and public health, and clinical medicine, as well as anatomy and physiology. The same report also indicated that: “In 2017, UCT received the highest number of direct awards and most funding from the US National Institute of Health (NIH) compared to any other higher education institution outside the US. It is, therefore, important to note that this faculty is a significant contributor to the university's global and national rankings which, in turn, translate into the enhancement of brand value or positive reputation.”

The faculty's association with Groote Schuur Hospital, one of premier tertiary academic hospitals in South Africa and on the continent, which trains some of the best doctors and health professionals in their fields, is one of the key strategic partnerships that enhance its national and global recognition. The groundbreaking first heart transplant in the world was conducted in this hospital under the leadership of Dr Chris Barnard, a feat



that established the hospital's global reputation as a research institution.

Given this background, it is no wonder that some of the university's vice-chancellors have either been professors or deans in the faculty, such as Professor Stuart Saunders (1981-1996), or were drawn from the medical profession, namely Dr Mamphela Ramphele (1997-2000) and Dr Max Price (2008-2018). The importance of the health sciences faculty within the institution seems to have been recognised in these appointments, not discounting other leadership and scholarship attributes these vice-chancellors may have had.

The FHS has complex and unique internal and external stakeholder relationships that need to be managed by a dean and his or her team. These include the following:

- The Western Cape Department of Health, which is responsible for the running of Groote Schuur Academic Hospital. The department jointly appoints many academics in the Faculty of Health Sciences, especially those who also work at the hospital. It also provides funding for a number of programmes that are administered by UCT academics.
- The involvement of faculty members with the Groote Schuur Academic Hospital as specialist health professionals as well as researchers overseeing research work and clinical trials or tests.
- Overseeing a large number of externally funded research grants such as NRF research chairs as well as those funded by science councils such as the South African Medical Research Council. Most of these involve large research teams from many institutions and often from different countries.
- The faculty has to interface with various health sector regulatory and professional bodies as well as the national health department.
- The faculty similarly has to interact with pharmaceutical companies as well as with companies that supply medical equipment.

These are some of relationships and stakeholders that a dean should manage in addition to the normal internal deanship management responsibilities within the institution. The fact that this faculty is a major contributor to the university's research and funding also puts a greater spotlight on its performance.

A common observation about the Faculty of Health Sciences was that it had had a high leadership turnover which often resulted in uncertainty, as well as inconsistencies in terms of leadership styles and the programmes initiated by the various incumbents.

A consideration of the aforementioned factors explains the relevance of the Faculty of Health Sciences to the positioning of UCT as a leading African university which is also globally competitive, and why the faculty's strength or weakness will always have a bearing on the reputation of the university.

### **Structure of the Faculty**

The structure of the Faculty of Health Sciences is as follows: The dean is the executive manager and leader of the faculty. Below the dean there are deputy deans focusing on specific administrative areas such as postgraduate studies, undergraduate studies, research and human resources. The next layer is that of heads of departments and directors of specialised centres and units. Within departments there are course conveners and then there are academic and administrative staff in various departments and portfolios. Medical and health sciences also have intensive programmes for their students involving a lot of practical training and research. There are various forums and levels of faculty leadership structures and these include the deanery or dean's team, comprising the dean and deputy deans. Another forum, the Dean's Advisory Committee (DAC), includes the dean, deputy deans and heads

of departments. To the uninitiated, this is sometimes confused with the Dean's Management Committee (DMC), an occasional structure whose membership varies. In this report the panel may succumb to these lapses. There is also a general faculty board assembly which includes all academic staff members. It is worth mentioning that each level of this structure is supported by administrative staff.

### **Professor Mayosi's Profile and Tenure as the Head of the Department of Medicine**

As a precursor to addressing Professor Mayosi's recruitment and rise to the deanship it is important to highlight salient aspects of his profile as an academic and head of the largest department within the faculty, the Department of Medicine. His status as a globally recognised scholar predates his appointment to the deanship. His reputation as a leading researcher was acknowledged through his NRF A-rating, was internationally recognised and was still growing. There is thus a general acceptance that his appointment as the dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences was a natural and highly anticipated next step in his career progression.

He had an outstanding academic record of Bachelor of Medical Science and MBChB from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, both with distinction, Fellowship of the College of Physicians of South Africa [FCP(SA)] from the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa as well as a DPhil from the University of Oxford. He was collecting a string of honours, awards and prizes for his work. These awards came as a result of his ground-breaking research in his field, which also attracted high-profile research funding and membership of international professional bodies. His stature had grown exponentially, especially during the time he was the head of the Department of Medicine, from 2006 until his appointment as the faculty dean in 2015.

It was during his tenure as the head of Medicine that he had the most impact, and this defined his professional life. Through his relentless drive to recruit, mentor and promote black scholars he was able to change the demographic profile of the department and faculty. The recruited scholars were given the opportunity to conduct research and complete their studies before they were placed in leadership positions. Many testimonies from the beneficiaries of his interventions talk of his intense drive to promote black excellence and transform the academic landscape through diversification of work and composition of academic leadership roles. He is also applauded for having raised the profile of the department through increased exposure to external stakeholders and resource mobilisation, especially through funding for research and revenues from publication. His own growing professional stature also contributed immensely to this profile.

On his leadership style, colleagues who worked within his department described him as a hard-working and dedicated leader, who spent most of his time in the office, or in the laboratories and hospital – between his attendances at conferences and his speaking engagements. They described him as a visionary, transformative leader who not only worked to diversify the profile of scholars and leaders in his department but also focused on African-centred research work and scholarship, among which was his extensive research and writings on Hamilton Naki, an African who had played a vital role in assisting Dr Chris Barnard in his heart-transplant work. Professor Mayosi was also passionate about building networks of researchers throughout the African continent. His colleagues also described him as an eloquent and persuasive public speaker.

He is described as having been a well-organised and highly structured leader who had a clear sense of the strategic direction of his department. He displayed a consultative style of leadership and was not comfortable with conflict. Despite this, he was assertive when it came to taking

decisions about the direction of his department. Overall, his department was effectively administered, with no reported challenges. Even though his close colleagues reported occasional stiff resistance from some senior white academics, he always managed to get things done. Colleagues in his department and the faculty, and the university at large, describe him as a passionate, engaging and persuasive scholar who was energetic and often animated on the topics he loved. One of these was the issue of altering the demographic profile of scholars in his department through supporting high-quality research.

During this busy period, he managed successfully to balance his ever-growing research work, often leading big research teams, and his work as a cardiologist at Groote Schuur Academic Hospital, his academic commitments as a lecturer and a supervisor as well as the management role as the head of the department, which demanded that he participate in various structures of the university.

### **Recruitment and Appointment as Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences**

When the position of Dean at the Faculty of Health Sciences became vacant and was advertised, Professor Mayosi is reported to have been reluctant initially to apply for the position, even though there was a general feeling that he was a natural fit for the job. His commitment to his growing portfolio of research may have been one of the reasons for this reluctance. Friends and colleagues encouraged him to apply and he was eventually persuaded to do so. Many supporters saw this as a stepping stone towards the vice-chancellorship of the institution one day. Although they did not mention this, there are parallels in the career path of Professor Sanders, who had been the head of Medicine as well as the FHS dean before being appointed UCT Vice-Chancellor in 1981.

Professor Mayosi finally yielded to numerous calls for him to apply for the deanship. It is reported that he was pitted against other candidates, at least one of whom had significant internal support. Of the people interviewed no one indicated their opposition to Mayosi's appointment but a few noted that they had quietly thought he was not yet ready.

Once Professor Mayosi was persuaded, he applied his mind and crafted a vision for the faculty. His presentation before the faculty and the recruitment panel during the selection process was reported by attendees to have been the most compelling they had ever heard, and there was no doubt that he had earned his appointment on merit. His appointment was announced by the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Max Price, on 17 November 2015 and he submitted a proposal that he spend part of his pending sabbatical at Harvard University in the United States, for executive leadership and management training, arguing that it would help him prepare for the new leadership role.

At the time of his appointment, student protests at UCT were already in full swing and had already involved the occupation of the office of the Vice-Chancellor (VC) Dr Max Price. There were instances when Dr Price was physically manhandled in an environment of intense and sometimes rude engagements. It is noteworthy that Professor Mayosi was not only aware of these political developments within the campus and across the public university sector in the country, but he was also involved in some of the engagements. Professor Greg Hussey was appointed as interim dean during Mayosi's absence on sabbatical leave. The faculty had had a high level of leadership turnover over the years, but had stabilised somewhat during the tenure of Professor Jacobs. However, having an interim arrangement in place in the midst of student turbulence while waiting for Professor Mayosi's return from sabbatical was not ideal.

### **Return from Harvard and Assumption of Deanship Duties**

In September 2016 Professor Mayosi returned from his sabbatical leave at Harvard University where he had reportedly used the time to refine his vision for the Faculty of Health Sciences. His spouse, Professor Nonhlanhla Khumalo, and his close colleagues indicated that he returned to assume his deanship filled with enthusiasm and looking forward to his tenure as dean. He was full of ideas and engaged his colleagues on his vision.

On 19 September 2016, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, announced that universities would be allowed individually to determine the level of a fee increase for 2017, up to a maximum of 8%. Nationwide protests erupted again, leading to the blockade and closure of many universities, including UCT where classes were suspended. This was followed by a march on Parliament by mainly Cape Town-based universities.

Ten days after Professor Mayosi's return to UCT, as the student protests were intensifying in the rest of the university, there was a shift in their focus onto the Faculty of Health Sciences. Student protests had largely been confined to the main campuses in Rondebosch as well as in the Arts Faculty's Hiddingh Campus. Up to this point, black students from the health sciences had not featured prominently in the protests until a group of undergraduate students from the faculty organised a campaign to occupy the dean's suite. The campaign would become known as #OccupyFHS. Up to this point student protests had not focused their attention on the Faculty of Health Sciences as they were raising broad institution-wide issues of transformation, insourcing and free education. Health Sciences students had been criticised by the broader UCT student protest movement for not being actively involved, and were sometimes even accused of elitism or of being treated differently from the rest. It is quite probable that the assumption of deanship by Professor Mayosi may

have raised expectations that a prominent black leader like himself, with a track record of transformation, would perform wonders in resolving long-standing issues in the faculty.

Students presented a list of grievances which mainly focused on their living conditions, lack of support in their studies, racism and education which had a colonial bias. Professor Mayosi and his staff had to work elsewhere during the days when their offices were occupied by the protestors. Each day the protests grew in intensity and then targeted the medical library, and the protesters were also threatening to break into laboratories which contained dangerous chemicals and biological specimens. Some staff members, particularly those of the Academic Staff for Social Justice in Education group, joined the protesting students and provided resources to support them.

At this juncture Professor Mayosi was actively participating in gatherings and deliberations on matters raised by protesting students, who were mainly calling for free quality education. On 22 September 2016 he even presented a memorandum to a representative of the Department of Higher Education and Training, appealing for improved funding in higher education.

### **Professor Mayosi's Handling of the #OccupyFHS Crisis and Multiple Backlashes**

In addition to existing forums, Professor Mayosi initiated the establishment of a general assembly for the faculty, in which all academic and administrative staff as well as students could directly participate, to resolve grievances raised by the students. The defining public engagement that is often mentioned was a general assembly in which a task team established by Professor Mayosi had come to report back on a list of demands that students had submitted. The assembly



was described as intense and emotionally charged with the students taking over the running of the meeting. There were moments of crude engagement, with students heckling staff members and rejecting some responses as inadequate. A member of staff seconded to the deanery, who had been selected to present on behalf of the staff, had an emotional breakdown in the meeting. According to information given to the panel, at this point Professor Mayosi was no longer in charge of the situation and had withdrawn into a passive state.

The meeting created a backlash from some staff members who felt the dean had failed to protect his staff or to assert himself. He was criticised for yielding to every demand the students had made and failing to insist on the position of the university. He was blamed for allowing anarchy to prevail, especially by those who advocated stronger law enforcement. This level of discontent would manifest itself in faculty meetings, among some heads of departments (HODs) and course conveners who were becoming more critical of concessions Professor Mayosi was making in his engagement. At the same time, some of the students were also criticising him for not being decisive enough in resolving their demands.

Another defining moment was when Professor Mayosi agreed to march with the students to present their demands to Dr Price and his senior executive team in the UCT administrative offices at Bremner Building. It was reported that this took the Vice-Chancellor by surprise as there seems to have been no prior warning that Professor Mayosi would join the march.

This is one of several incidents which put him at variance with executive management positions on the handling of student protests and demands. These include his undertaking that he would not allow private security to be brought to FHS during protests when the university had already sought an interdict and brought in security and police to contain the

protests. At an institutional level, the university had also decided to go ahead and write examinations and complete the semester when Professor Mayosi, after consulting and getting approval from his faculty colleagues, decided to shorten the FHS semester and to postpone some examinations to early 2017. It transpired that there was no consensus on this step, as some faculty members were critical of this decision and openly refused to support the postponement of examinations. Although some students were pleased with his intervention, others were not happy with being sent to home early and examinations being postponed.

Professor Mayosi, who was consistently described as a person who was not comfortable with conflict, was now firmly at the centre of a political storm and facing backlash from all sides. In moments of such intense contestation, stakeholders and protagonists often expect clearly defined allegiances even if the reality is more complex, demanding serious trade-offs as a pathway towards reconciling diverse and sometimes contradictory expectations.

He was described by interviewees as having blamed himself for failing to manage the situation and as also blaming himself for problems that were not of his making, such as an administrative blunder which led to the sending out of admission letters to applicants who had in fact not been successful. Throughout this period there were signs that Professor Mayosi had started to have mental health challenges which manifested themselves in several ways including inability to sleep, anxiety, withdrawal and non-engagement, procrastination and indecisiveness. The cumulative effect and convergence of these political pressures from students, conflicting positions with university leadership as well as growing backlash from some of his staff members must have aggravated his mental health situation.

Observations of Professor Mayosi's rise to deanship and the dynamics of his tenure as dean reveal the political turbulence that coincided with his term, and the mental health issues and the strenuous efforts he made to provide leadership in a hostile and often unsupportive environment. He seems to have been isolated from some powerful colleagues within his faculty and was also at variance with the senior leadership of the university on how to handle some critical matters around the student protests. When contrasted with his tenure as the head of the Department of Medicine it is clear that the aforementioned factors prevented him from performing as optimally and effectively as he had done in his former position.

Some elements of the challenges mentioned above are examined in some detail in subsequent chapters, starting with the following chapter on the nature and impact of the student protests.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE IMPACT OF STUDENT PROTESTS AND CRITICISMS BY COLLEAGUES

The call for the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at UCT in March 2015 was the beginning of students' protests that spread to tertiary institutions nation-wide. From its onset, it was clear that the #RhodesMustFall call went far beyond Rhodes, and transcended even the idea of Rhodes as a “symbol” of colonial oppression. The issues that students raised were real. They concerned the lived experience of a post-apartheid generation confronted everyday with the dehumanising reminders of their blackness: feelings of alienation; institutional cultures and structures that sustain inequality; the violence of racism—not so much of the physical but of the psychological kind. In other words, it seemed the claim of “progress” had a false ring to it: admission of black students to a historically white institution was itself a symbol that something had changed, however, black students' actual experiences at UCT symbolised the failures of the post-apartheid transformation agenda. Thus, the call for the dismantlement of the statue of Rhodes was a crying out from a place of shame and pain, a desire for the breakdown of structures that sustained black people's historical oppression. The statue had great symbolic power, the Mission Statement of #RhodesMustFall stated. The call for the removal of Rhodes' statue, however, was a “starting point” that would mark not the end, “but the beginning of the long overdue process of decolonising this university.” At the heart of this broader struggle for change and transformation, the Mission Statement of #RhodesMustFall explains,

is the dehumanisation of black people at UCT. This dehumanisation is a violence exacted only against black people by a system that privileges whiteness. [...] It is therefore crucial that this movement flows from the black voices and black pain that have been continuously ignored and silenced.

This then is what the students' "Fallist" movement that began at UCT was about—the dismantling of the legacies of the past that continued to reproduce deep inequality, frustrating black students' expectations in ways that had a profound impact on their capacity to achieve their full potential at UCT. At its core, Njabulo Ndebele<sup>2</sup> informs us, the movement "was a more elemental source of student disaffection: being 'black' in a 'white' world." As these broader concerns about issues of social justice and social and institutional change were articulated, a profound unity between students and workers grew, adding new "hashtag" issues to the demand for change and transformation. By the end of 2015, the students' protest had shifted to the call for #FeesMustFall, and, with an increasing focus on workers' concerns, they broadened their attention to include #EndOutsourcing. This can be seen as the coming together of the voices of the humiliated and marginalised at UCT taking a stand for recognition of their dignity and to reclaim their right to be heard.

### **#FeesMustFall at UCT: Installation of #Shackville**

After the announcement by then President Zuma of a 0% increase in tuition fees at universities,<sup>3</sup> one might have expected this to result in a sense of triumph among students, that their voices counted, and that the president's announcement was concrete evidence of this;

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<sup>2</sup> Njabulo S, Ndebele (2016). "They Are Burning Memory".

<sup>3</sup> <https://marxist.co.za/south-africa?start=36>

but if there was any excitement, it was muted. It soon became clear that the issues that inspired the #FessMustFall campaign were only addressed partially in Zuma's speech, and the campaign resumed at tertiary institutions countrywide at the beginning of the academic year in 2016. A unique feature of the campaign at UCT was the erection in February 2016 of a corrugated iron structure that resembled "informal settlement" homes in Residence Road at UCT's Upper Campus. With this structure, the students aimed to call attention to the financial challenges faced by black students, and the plight of those who could not find accommodation at UCT—or, seen from the perspective of students, for whom UCT could not provide adequate housing. The calls for students to remove the structure was unheeded by students. This was followed by battles—physical and legal—arrest of students, expulsion, suspension and interdicts to prevent students from coming to campus. #Shackville became a site of confrontation between students and UCT's private police. The burning of visual artwork and UCT's historic photographs by students was another major flashpoint—the violence of the fire and the violence of stun grenades, teargas and police arrests, leading to shutdown campaigns and the new "hashtag" campaign to #BringBackOurCadres, a demand that all students who had been suspended or expelled be allowed to return to UCT. A truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) was proposed with a petition under the banner #ShackvilleTRC, which was led by Brian Kamanzi, a member of the #RhodesMustFall movement, as a way of addressing these issues raised by students.<sup>4</sup> The idea of a UCT TRC did not materialise in a meaningful way and students continued their protest activities, with blockages, shutdowns and suspension of classes continuing.

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<sup>4</sup> See Brian Kamanzi's statement on this issue here: <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-05-19-00-ucts-trc-a-weapon-in-proxy-war/>

It was in the height of these protests in the latter part of the second semester that Professor Mayosi returned to take up his position as dean. Initially the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) had no visible presence, as *FHS*, in the protests. But this changed in September 2016, when within a few days of Professor Mayosi's assumption of duties as dean, students presented a list of demands. Unsatisfied with the way that their demands were received, the students occupied the Deans' suite for almost two weeks under the name #OccupyFHS. In the next section, we will trace some of the moments that we consider key in considering the circumstances that surrounded Professor Mayosi's encounters with students' protests and with some members of the faculty during the time of students' protests at the FHS.

We should point out here that with regards this issue of students' protests, two narratives emerged from the interviews. One was that Professor Mayosi maintained a good relationship with students in his faculty despite the difficulties and acrimony of #OccupyFHS. On the other hand, however, there is evidence that students showed an incredible amount of disrespect, both in face-to-face encounters with him and in numerous electronic communication with him. In this regard, some of his colleagues and people close to Professor Mayosi described in the interviews how this deeply distressed him. We considered these distressing moments described to us in the broader context of how the students' protests played out in other institutions. We were also cognisant of reports of the injunction from some of his colleagues for him not to take the students' verbal attacks personally. Thus, in the next section, we want to trace the various moments of Professor Mayosi's encounter with the students' protest, and consider these moments against the backdrop of what was revealed by his colleagues as an upbeat state of mind about the prospect of leading the faculty to fresh heights, and illustrate the various moments of highs as well as the instances of when others noticed a change setting in.

### **Professor Mayosi's Ecounter with Student Protests**

Professor Mayosi's return to take up his new position was greeted with excitement by his colleagues. We were informed by some of the academic staff members we interviewed that after he accepted the appointment to the position of dean, he had a very well thought out plan to prepare himself for the role. For his sabbatical, he enrolled for the prestigious Advanced Management Program at the Harvard Business School. During his time in the United States, he visited a select few faculties of medicine to speak to their deans and to learn what made these faculties successful. By the time he returned to UCT, he was full of great ideas that he shared, to his colleagues' great enthusiasm. Many of them had benefitted from his stellar leadership when he was Head of Department of Medicine, and now they spoke about that moment when he mapped out his vision for the faculty as a moment of hope, "the start of a Golden Age." Here is how one of the interviewees described it:

Bongani said to us that he planned for the rest of the year—and it's chillingly ironic in hindsight—he said that he planned to spend the rest of the year with the students and to really understand what was going on with the curriculum, you know, the health and rehab students. And I remember telling a colleague: can you imagine how privileged these students are, Bongani is going to spend the rest of this year just immersing himself, can you imagine how fantastic that's going to be? I was so excited that Bongani was going to immerse himself in the curriculum .... and that was the last week in August. He came into the Deanery the next week and the very first DAC meeting, right at the end of the meeting, he sort of, he sketched his vision for kind of how he wanted to lead the faculty .... I walked out of that first DAC meeting, and I, it was just one of my most powerful memories, just walking out there with this—this unbelievable sense of excitement that, you know, Bongani as Dean! There was such energy and such opportunity and he had come back from Harvard, with such a mission and, you know, there was so many things he was going to do.



Interviewees spoke about how they were inspired by Professor Mayosi's plans for the faculty. Along with meetings with students, he wanted to meet with the then Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, and to spend a month with the higher education cluster because, as he told his colleagues, "I want to understand how the money works." He was "buzzing and enthusiastic", as one of his colleagues said. Another one described the general mood of excited anticipation brought about by Professor Mayosi's return to take up his position as Dean:

I will use the word elation that accompanied his appointment ... It was elation. He was going to take us to another level. He spoke the language of taking us to another level in an inclusive way, in a way that resonated with so many people and in a way that brought to mind what he had done in the Department of Medicine.

This excerpt below from one of Professor Mayosi's colleagues clearly illustrates the buzzing enthusiasm and feeling of elation described above. At the first meeting with heads of departments (DAC meeting), he asked each of his colleagues how they envisioned the next five years:

Everyone sort of mumbled and talked and he let this go on for about an hour. Then, when there was about thirty minutes left, he goes, 'I have listened ...', and then he describes his vision for the Faculty. Everyone left that meeting completely blown away, feeling like we are going to conquer the world. So, this is him arriving before the agitation started. Then the Fees Must Fall activity starts ...

### **Professor Mayosi's first encounter with students demands**

We mentioned earlier in this report that the students from the FHS did not feature and/or were not visible in the protest as a collective. The explanation for this, according to one of the interviewees, is

that medical students were afraid that because of a fewer number of students participating from the FHS, they would be exposed and singled out. According to one of the interviewees, students from Upper Campus “stormed Health Sciences” and challenged the FHS students to participate in the protest and to observe the shutdown:

The upper campus students would go out, they would shut the university and they would go on their marches around the campus to close and pull people out of the classroom.

And then our students on health sciences would feel like we must do this in solidarity, and Professor Mayosi was trying to mediate that situation which was very difficult. Obviously he supported a lot of what the students were saying but he also had this pressure of seeing the consequences of so many of them not graduating at the end of the year.

Several interviewees spoke about Professor Mayosi’s support of the students’ demands because he felt they were legitimate concerns. The first time that he had to face the students was when they asked him and his team to meet them as a group in an open forum. At this meeting, the students presented their list of demands. The students’ manner of presenting their demands was described as “quite forceful in demeanor”, according to one of the interviewees. Professor Mayosi was “taken aback” by this forceful language of demands, and he told the students that he refused to be “subjected to an inquisition of this manner” before walking out with his team. Some of his colleagues, however, went to his office and advised him to listen to the students and the issues they raised rather than dismiss their demands in this manner.

### **Professor Mayosi’s Support of Students and Students’ Respect for Him**

The main grievances are a list of 34 demands that were broken down

into three main areas: the first outlined issues that affected students in general, such as the presence of private security on campus, and the second area concerned matters pertaining to the deanery as a whole, with a demand for a review of the deanery. The list also contained a range of problems that they experienced as black students in the FHS, including issues that pertained to their student life, such as experiences of victimization, marginalization, problems with UCT's Jamie shuttle which did not always get them to clinics on time, cost of vaccines that were essential in their clinical work. One of the FHS staff members summarized the problems that students outlined in their demands:

The transportation problems—students didn't have cars and they were at the mercy of the Jamie Shuttle. The bus driver would arrive at the clinic late—and of course, they were all black—and because the white students had cars they would be there early. They would get humiliated as these blacks who are always arriving late. The other issue had to do with a Hepatitis B vaccine that students had to have to be on the hospital ... and that wasn't part of school fees and they were expected to pay out of pocket for this vaccine. There was also the issue of fees ... so all these things. So students packaged these issues nicely and it's all there and all very substantive and important issues.

Notwithstanding Professor Mayosi's initial reaction to the students' approach when they first presented the demands, taking into account references to the issue of students' grievances in all the interviews, there is no doubt that he embraced the legitimacy of the problems the students raised. During a faculty staff meeting where some members of staff were dismissive of the students' concerns, one interviewee described how Professor Mayosi managed to steer discussion toward serious engagement with the matters brought up by the students:

I remember one meeting in particular that started out the usual tone of talking as if the students were guilty with no acknowledgement of any of the importance of the issues they wanted to be addressed. Some of us spoke out to say look, here are some hard facts we can't get away from: there are students sleeping in the library who don't know where their next meal is coming from. Whatever your political leanings are or however you see this, you cannot ignore – these are facts ... all these issues, of transport and others, these are facts of students' life. So Bongani was able to steer things in such a way that in fact, they agreed as the Deanery to accept and take on all of those demands.

Failure to respond to these students' demands within the agreed time-period, however, led to the occupation of the Deans' suite and the establishment of #OccupyFHS. There are two moments that were often cited in the interviews as evidence of Professor Mayosi's support of, and commitment to address the students' issues. The first followed the setting up of task teams by Professor Mayosi to respond to the demands. At the end of this process, there was joyful celebration when the outcome was accepted by the students, with singing of the “decolonization national anthem”.<sup>5</sup> Professor Mayosi joined in the celebratory spirit, warming the hearts of many students. One interviewee described how his presence made the students feel heard for the first time.

The second moment that is referenced as a reflection of Professor Mayosi's empathy for the issues that students raised is his marching with them to UCT's administration offices at the Bremner Building. Following the successful response to the students' demands, students terminated their occupation of the Deans' suite and marched to Bremner to deliver a

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<sup>5</sup> “Tracing the Roots of the ‘Decolonised Anthem’”, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2017-06-28-tracing-the-roots-of-the-decolonised-anthem/>

set of demands to the Vice Chancellor, Dr. Max Price. Professor Mayosi's presence in this march with some of his senior colleagues was a source of pride for the students. Those interviewed for this report described feeling a sense of validation that their Black Dean was marching with them. One of Professor Mayosi's colleagues explained that for him, Professor Mayosi, joining the march and being in the front of the march was symbolically important,

because as a matter of principle there was no doubt that he felt that much of the issues – not the how of protest, but the issues that were on the table – were hugely important and that he was not conflicted about this in any way.

The students' demands were not only supported by Professor Mayosi. The panel got a general sense from the interviews that some members of the faculty felt that the problems that students presented were real and that these problems needed to be addressed; however, students were criticized for the way they expressed their grievances. Here is how one of the interviewees conveyed the faculty staff's appreciation of what students were going through:

I think that we as a faculty focused—and maybe Bongani, myself, all of us oldies—we focused on research and making ourselves the top research university in the country with the most A-rated NRF researchers, and we didn't see that we were losing the plot. We didn't see that a lot of black students had come from very difficult circumstances, that being the first child in the family to finish matric—I mean coming to UCT and expecting that students function as if they came from privileged backgrounds. So I was very sympathetic to the students, I wasn't sympathetic to violence or abusive behaviour, but I understood where they were coming from. And I think Bongani did.

Some of the academic staff members interviewed recounted moments when students behaved respectfully. For example at one of the open forums that had become platforms through which students engaged with the Dean and his staff, students were described to have been “particularly tough.” Yet the interviewee pointed out that their behaviour was not necessarily rude or disrespectful toward Professor Mayosi:

There was a kind of ... an element of the way that they spoke to him, that was veiled politeness, but very, very firm. I think they saw vulnerability and they exploited it. It was my own reading. This was where the decision was made to march on Bremner.

We pointed out earlier that this is a march that Professor Mayosi—as well as some of his colleagues—joined out of principle because they believed that the students’ demands were legitimate. There is another view, however, that suggests that the decision to join the march was forced in a move instigated by a group of academic staff members. We will return to this issue of instigation by staff members in the section below. Notwithstanding these suggestions that the Dean joined the march because of pressure, evidence from student and faculty staff who were interviewed shows that Professor Mayosi’s voice in debates about transformation stood out, and he was supportive of the substantive issues pertaining to transformation at UCT even before the protests broke out.

For instance, he is remembered for statements he made during a Senate meeting in early 2015 where the issue of the statue of Cecil Rhodes was debated. A former student leader recalled a particularly challenging debate at Senate about the fate of the statue. According to the student, at one point during the debate at an early stage of discussions about the statue, it seemed as if the students’ side was going to lose the debate regarding the fate of the statue when Professor Mayosi intervened and

offered an incisive contribution and spoke about the need for a “rupture” from the colonial past: “He said that UCT ought to see the process as part of a rupture from our colonial past into a new dispensation.” One of the senior faculty staff members interviewed remembered being struck by the moral clarity of Professor Mayosi’s intervention at the same Senate meeting evoked by this student:

I remember that is where Bongani used this concept of “rupture”. It was around Rhodes Must Fall where things were kind of hotting up and he was quite active and very constructive, always very constructive ... Bongani was very collegial and even when he was making very, very powerful points. There was some discussion about transformation, and Bongani’s contribution was that look, a lot of these steps and initiatives and so on and so forth are commendable, but what we need is rupture, that is the word he used - “rupture.” And that is how he understood transformation, that there must be a process of rupture and that you must take dramatic, unprecedented steps that will change the shape and character of the institution.

In general, students interviewed expressed admiration for Professor Mayosi and his contribution to transformation. “I admired him quite a lot” is how one of the students described feelings about Professor Mayosi. Yet along with the high regard in which Professor Mayosi was held by students, he also experienced extreme criticism that was sometimes expressed in disrespectful ways by students.

### **Students’ Behaviour Towards Professor Mayosi and Instigation by Staff**

Several interviewees spelt out or alluded to moments when students’ behaviour towards Professor Mayosi was discourteous. Interviewees also described moments when academic staff members were instigators of such disrespect. One interviewee puts it this way:

There's no doubt that, for me, the calamity that happened at the end of 2016 was not just the onslaught from the students. But it was, I think, a very deep sense of betrayal that he hadn't been able to, to kind of count on staff for as much support as he should have been able to have as the Dean. And I think that that was the really toxic combination that, for the onslaught from the students and the lack of support from staff and staff behaving and sometimes in appallingly inappropriate ways.

An interview excerpt that illustrates this inappropriate behaviour by a staff member recounts the remarks made by a FHS staff member at a students' protest meeting in which the staff member expressed sympathy for the students' cause, and telling students about being frustrated "by the system". "As a matter of fact," the person reportedly continued, "I want this university to burn, I want this whole world to burn, burn, burn." The seniority of staff members who were perceived to be instigators may have made it difficult for some student interviewees to speak openly about how these instigators influenced their actions. This was borne out by an interview in which the student described the tension between the advice of the academic staff member on the one hand, and on the other, the student's moral sense of knowing that the line of action suggested by the staff member would be hurtful and disrespectful. When the panel asked the student to tell us more about the particular circumstances the student was referring to and to share specific examples, the student replied: "I don't feel comfortable discussing that primarily because of the fear."

The general sense conveyed by these interviews with people who spoke clearly about, or alluded to students' and staff members' disrespectful behaviour is that Professor Mayosi felt a deep sense of humiliation as a result of these actions. "He was disrespected everywhere or felt that way". There were moments during the panel's interviews when it was clear that sometimes students themselves were concerned about the



disrespectful behavior toward Professor Mayosi. This quote from one of the interviews serves to illustrate:

Somebody in the crowd suggested that there be an occupation and so then we occupied, but I remember not feeling comfortable with that decision primarily because I think protest is good for anarchy, but you can't build with anarchy ... I remember hearing somebody speak to him in a way that was very disrespectful. I know for a fact that we let him down. I remember that meeting dismantling and then becoming just...you know, just like a name-calling of Prof.

One such public engagement in which students are reported to have behaved in a disrespectful manner occurred when Professor Mayosi had to report back to his Faculty a decision of the Senior Leadership Group (SLG)—which consists of all Deans, Department heads, Directors, and members of the university executive—where it was resolved that the university would not be closed amidst plans for a march on parliament. The Faculty of Health Sciences was expected to close in order to allow students to participate in the march on parliament. When Professor Mayosi conveyed the university's official position on this issue, the students' reaction is captured by one of his colleagues as follows:

Bongani was just absolutely eviscerated. When he conveyed the decision in this stammering voice ... this powerful orator who kind of commanded a room had been reduced to someone who was just so unsure of himself, and so terrified, and understandably, in that situation. And, you know, he explained to them that he couldn't close the faculty, because that was the university's decision. And the rage was just massive ...

Another interviewee described how Professor Mayosi sometimes had to make decisions under extreme pressure that seems to have left

him with a diminished sense of integrity. The quote below from one of his colleagues serves to illustrate one such moment which led to him tendering his first resignation letter:

He worked until late at night and at about 20h30, a group of students from the #OccupyFHS movement went to his office and really expressed their great disappointment with him ... And so they forced him they said they were not going to leave until he sent out an email to faculty that students would be given a DP concession. And then the next day he didn't come to work and he handed his first resignation letter to Max Price because he felt that he had severely compromised his integrity and that he had lost the confidence of both students and staff.

Professor Mayosi's fear of facing the students occurred a few other times. In this next quote, a colleague describes this fear and suggests that the whole experience may have induced what seemed to be post-traumatic stress (PTSD). Here is how this person explains the situation:

He phoned me one morning when ... it was early 2017 when a student, a whole student uprising had started again and students were marching to the faculty and he phoned me and he said, please come I can't face the students. And these are students from upper campus ... And I kind of remember thinking at the time, you know, this is almost like a PTSD that, you know, you're just being pulverised so often by the students, so just the prospects of this flaring up again. I mean, for him to find me and say please come, I was, I mean, I was quite taken aback because it wasn't ... he hadn't often asked me for help.

And then another time, I went into the Deanery and he called me into his office and he was incredibly flustered and it was almost like a PTSD. He had got an email from #Occupy, demanding immediate action on

something and he said to me, what must I do about this? And I said, Bongani, the first thing is these emails must stop. You cannot as Dean be held hostage to these anonymous emails that you don't, you don't even know if it's coming from somebody in our faculty. But I think he was just completely ... I said earlier, it was almost like the aftershocks of what happened in 2016. And for me, the timeline is this massive pit ... I think he really struggled and all the horror of 2016 was sort of revisited ... it was the so called hot seat in late October.

The problem of Professor Mayosi “losing” his voice and descending into a state of fear and stuttering came up in a few other accounts by colleagues from different levels, administrative staff and students. One of the interviewees described witnessing the transformation of Professor Mayosi and his deterioration thus:

Yes, so I think if we agree that you know the protests concluded and the students were happy and there was a sense of accomplishment at the end of that, there's a person who emerged out of that not being the same person. Bongani was different. The confidence was gone. The ability to make firm and quick decisions was gone ... The person that I saw in the room that day speaking to the department, was a very broken person. He struggled to articulate himself. There was just... there was no self-confidence ... It was just—it was someone else.

This section began with sharing statements from Professor Mayosi's colleagues about his very first meeting when he returned to UCT to assume his duties as Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences. The aim is to show the “spirit” with which he came to his new role. It was “the start of a Golden age” is the way that one of his colleagues remembers that moment of hope. The section ends with the statement above from one

of the staff members in the faculty who paints a picture of Professor Mayosi as a person who had become a shadow of the person who only a few months earlier had inspired a sense of hope: Professor Mayosi “was just—it was someone else.” This observation by his colleagues is confirmed by Professor Mayosi’s own words in notes provided to the panel in which he states that he was “deeply affected by the trauma of the period.”

Our aim is not to attribute blame on any members of the university community whose words and actions are recounted in the interviews we conducted. Rather, it is simply to tell the story of what happened. Njabulo Ndebele, in his reflection on the burning of the artworks around the #Shackville protests, poses a question that we found instructive:

When will the fires be tamed, and what will it take to tame them, so that new art work can be forged; to [create] new industries and forge inventions to meet the needs of a people in intimate dialogue with their new world?<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the best response to Ndebele is a statement from one of the student activists we interviewed. The person speaks to what Julia Kristeva<sup>7</sup> says about moments of unprecedented possibility, “the freedom to revolt, to call things into question” in order to bring about social change and transformation:

I think nuance is important, because I can understand how a person of his calibre and achievement and stature would feel disrespected by people who would speak to him in that particular way, especially also

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<sup>6</sup> Njabulo S, Ndebele (2016). “They Are Burning Memory”. <https://www.njabulondebele.co.za/2016/09/they-are-burning-memory/>

<sup>7</sup> Julia Kristeva (2002). *Revolt She Said*, p. 12. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

in a public setting, but at the same time, I think what a lot of people don't understand is the desperation from the students' side, is that this is the first time where we've actually gotten an opportunity to be able to express on a public platform, the way...you know, how we feel about things and how we feel...and the ability, the power to be able to make a decision or have an impact that will be heard and that will resonate beyond just our res rooms. And so from their side, there was a lot of anger and frustration. And you know, kind of now we finally have an opportunity to say that this is how we feel, but because of that, you know that desperation that ... coupled with all of this fear, all of this secrecy that's finally coming out. There was no tact in the way that it was expressed.

And to conclude this section, an honest answer from a #Fallist to the question of what the appropriate words might be in an encounter with Professor Mayosi's family:

How do I say you know, we acted with the best intentions and I apologise for the outcome, but expected... and then expected to still you know also understand why, you know, why we protested as well? I don't think I could...I wouldn't want to approach that space, just honestly and it would be dishonest to say that we shouldn't have protested at all. Perhaps maybe the way that we protested could've been done better, but at the end of the day there were issues that needed to be addressed and Prof was unfortunately placed in between us and the university.

### **Professor Mayosi's Encounter with Criticism by his Colleagues and by Management**

At the other end of the spectrum of the reaction to Professor Mayosi's role as Dean during this tumultuous period are the various positions

held by line managers, faculty colleagues and management. There is evidence that when things “thickened” in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Professor Mayosi was expected to make decisions, the decisions he made were not always well-received. Increasingly, a negative perception grew about his leadership of the faculty, and he was facing criticisms from all fronts. One of his colleagues suggested that much as Professor Mayosi was “very uncomfortable with the level of disrespect that he experienced”, the problem was not simply the students’ demeaning behaviour. “In the thick of things,” Professor Mayosi’s colleague pointed out, “students throw all sorts of things during the protest, but it would never have been a direct thing on him. In my view, that is not the issue. The issue really is did he get the support. Did he get the support?”

In this quote below from one of the panel’s interviews with members of academic staff at the Faculty of Health Sciences, the panel members were given a clearer picture of how Professor Mayosi experienced the responses of his colleagues in this most trying of times for academics in positions of leadership at South African institutions of higher education. The contribution of this participant to our panel process painted a picture of a man alone, under siege from all directions “with nowhere to turn.” The person said Professor Mayosi was often under attack by his colleagues at Faculty meetings:

The Faculty meetings got very hot and very heated ... He spoke about that room [where the meetings were held] and said it is like sitting in a dark room.... His description—and these were his words—was that it was like sitting with bombs landing. He didn’t name names. ... I had never seen Bongani so despondent.

Some of the interviewees made a point of reminding the panel that in seeking to understand the circumstances that prevailed in the FHS around the time of Professor Mayosi’s tenure as Dean, Professor Mayosi’s

encounters with his colleagues should also be considered. A Faculty staff member explains:

Personally I don't think it's just the students. I think there are many members of the university who had a bit of a role to play. There was also this very personal attack on him by some of the staff, black academic caucus - I think what stands out for me in this regard is one of the meetings with the students. It wasn't just students, there were staff there as well and the students had started this sort of personal attack on Prof Mayosi.

Another member of the Deans Advisory Committee (DAC, later renamed the Deans Management Committee, DMC) described the visible signs that showed Professor Mayosi's inner struggle with the forces from without at meetings:

I used to sit in these DAC meetings during the course of 2017 and watch him. ... I could see his legs in these meetings. You know, his leg used to bounce in meetings. He showed all of the signs - all of the signs of anxiety and depression - and I did nothing. We all knew he was sick. You know, you talk about where the real problems are - we all knew he was sick. We all knew, it was just so obvious .... And to watch him stand up on occasion and unable to get words out—to watch this giant of a man unable to come to a Faculty Board and at the last minute for someone to stand in for him and chair it ....

“We all saw it” was simply how another of Professor Mayosi's colleagues put it. They all saw the signs and they would watch him “nodding off” at meetings: “I've never seen him nod off before this. He was always very perky.” It was instructive to listen to the views expressed about the help and support by colleagues who tried to “cover” and stand in for Professor Mayosi as the pressure from all sides increased and affected

his capacity to meet the demands of his role of leadership in the faculty. One staff member asked a rhetorical albeit pertinent question: Given that Professor Mayosi's deteriorating health was in plain sight, did the constant efforts to stand in and cover for him reflect a "subliminal" – the staff member's word – agenda to let things slide and to slowly destroy Professor Mayosi's reputation? There is a fine line, the staff member pointed out, between offering support and an insidious agenda to allow the problem to worsen rather than stepping in to address its root cause.

The Panel reflected on this issue. It seemed clear from the interviews that on the one hand, there was a section of Professor Mayosi's Faculty colleagues who were excited about his return to take up the deanship and saw it as the beginning of "the Golden Age". They had witnessed his exceptional leadership as Head of the Department of Internal Medicine, the evidence of which has already been documented, and they had heard him present his vision for the Faculty at his first meeting as Dean. On the other hand, however, there were voices of dissent, those who dismissed his appointment as a hyped up stance for someone incapable of leading the Faculty. It is not possible for the panel to explore these positions fully in this report. The panel can, however, as much as possible, refer to the interviews to consider, according to its mandate, the circumstances that prevailed around the nuances of how the relationship between Professor Mayosi and his colleagues unfolded.

In one interview, the Panel was told about the existence of a "dossier" that was put together by some of Professor Mayosi's colleagues to demonstrate how he was not coping in his position as dean. One participant described how Professor Mayosi was discussed at a meeting of senior members of the faculty as a Dean who "was not coping". Among others, the impetus for such a view seems to have been decisions that he took in the midst of the crisis of the Health Sciences students' demands, the campus-wide students' protests and the ramifications



that these events had on the programme at various levels of study from undergraduate to fourth-year level.

With regard to this issue of the decisions that Professor Mayosi took – whether it was to send undergraduate students home at a particularly critical time of the year, to create the so-called “mini-semester” to deal with the backlog of work that was required in order to fulfill curricular and practical requirements for medical students – it seemed clear to the panel that Professor Mayosi was faced with an extremely difficult and abnormal situation. The interviews presented in this chapter suggest that the circumstances that prevailed during his tenure as dean were extraordinarily grueling, and that he had to deal with a crisis he landed into from the first week in the job, which, according to the interviews the panel conducted, seems to have escalated throughout most of his deanship. Yet he was criticised by some of his colleagues who said he was making decisions without consulting them. A staff member from the FHS refutes this claim and refers to one of the decisions that evoked criticism and strong opposition from both staff and students as a case in point:

It is untrue to say that Bongani took that decision [for the mini-semester] all by himself. We, the course convenors, actually almost forced him to take that decision, because we were the most severely affected. Everything just got cancelled to the point where we said that as course convenors we were unable to pass students who have only taken, I think at that time, what amounted to about thirty percent of the year mark .... It was during the height of the shutdown where you could experience three or four days without university operations. It was during that time that he called us and he asked people what do they think. So we all agreed with the idea of a mini-semester and then Bongani said, go and draft a statement. We drafted a statement ...

The inevitable conclusion that the panel can draw from the preceding information and from other interviews that speak to the consultations and difficult dialogues that Professor Mayosi had with his colleagues at different levels about matters that concern the Faculty, is that in whatever way that Professor Mayosi consulted with his colleagues, there is evidence that he tried under difficult circumstances to get the views of others before making decisions about the direction that the faculty should take on specific issues as they arose. The incident when he was forced by students to send out a message that students would be granted DP concession (see section under “Students’ behaviour towards Professor Mayosi and instigation by staff” in this chapter) is one that was made under duress. Other staff members on whom this kind of students’ forcefulness had an impact were mentioned in some of the interviews.

In the earlier section on the impact of students’ protests on Professor Mayosi, the panel described his experience of humiliating encounters with students, which, as pointed out by one of his colleagues, he found to be in conflict with his values. However, the panel also referred to reports about students’ appreciation of Professor Mayosi’s support. From the interviews, it became clear to the panel that Professor Mayosi was not only concerned about transformation at UCT, but also more specifically that he found the students’ demands to be legitimate and was committed to addressing these demands. A quote from an interview with one of Professor Mayosi’s colleagues serves to illustrate this point: “I have heard this thing about abusive things that students were saying,” the faculty staff member said. “Students would have said these things, but it is very, very clear that all students, especially the activist students, knew who Bongani was and they knew what he stood for.” What he stood for, according to Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) staff members was a principled position that the issues that students had brought up in their demands were important. For some of the people that the panel interviewed, the #FeesMustFall protests opened up an opportunity

for students at the FHS to “speak out” about what they perceived as an institutional culture of silencing of their experiences of exclusion, marginalisation and victimization, all of which were seen to reflect deep-seated racism. When the decision was taken to march to Bremner, the University of Cape Town’s main administrative offices, to present the students’ demands to the Vice Chancellor, Professor Mayosi joined the march with some of his colleagues.

From the interviews, it seems that most FHS staff members supported the idea of joining the march to Bremner with the students, although it emerged that some may have experienced pressure to join the march. In one such case, the interviewee suggested that a faculty staff member “vehemently demanded” that a directive be issued to staff to join the march:

I drew the line at that. I drew the line and I took a lot of flak from this person who basically said which side are you on. So again we were all being asked to take sides in a conflict where there were so many sides. It was hard to know where you sat. Your principles were being tested at every level.

Evidence of tension among academic staff at the FHS came up in a few other interviews. This shows the very difficult conditions that Professor Mayosi would have been confronted with in the wake of the #Occupy movement, the students’ demands and all that these circumstances threw up for him as the one expected to be accountable not only for the Faculty, but also for the aftermath of all that was happening. Strong views were expressed that while the efforts of colleagues who belonged to one of the activist groups played an important role in the communication with students at the FHS, some individuals in this group had a “polarizing” effect in the Faculty:

They are very righteous people, you know, and righteous people sometimes – it’s their way or no way. I admired them for some of the things they did but I did to a degree disagree with their perception of what was happening, calling the occupation “beautiful”. It was not to me beautiful.

Some of the people interviewed spoke about the backlash from the university’s senior management against Professor Mayosi’s participation in the march. One participant described the fallout as a “pivotal moment of isolation” for Professor Mayosi. He became, in the Faculty staff member’s views, a Dean who was isolated from senior management, from the deanery, and was “a symbol of much hostility from students with nowhere to turn.” Yet it was clear that although Professor Mayosi strongly supported the students’ demands enough to take a principled position to accompany them to Bremner, he however did not condone the students’ actions when some of them turned violent. Statements from some of his colleagues concerning his response when some students lashed out violently at the former Vice-Chancellor, Dr Max Price, during protests serve as examples to illustrate Professor Mayosi’s position on students’ behaviour. Following what was described as the punching of the Vice-Chancellor during an October 2016 protest march, one of Professor Mayosi’s colleagues sent him an email expressing concern about the incident, to which he replied “an assault on the Vice Chancellor is an assault on all of us.”

Concerning the question of the reaction that reportedly led to Professor Mayosi’s isolation after he participated in the march to Bremner, the panel considered different views by his colleagues. First, what is the evidence that there was a fallout between Professor Mayosi and senior management? Perhaps one of the answers to this question is from an interview with a colleague of Professor Mayosi’s who pointed out that it was generally believed by most of them in the Faculty that Professor

Mayosi's appearance leading in the front of the march to Bremner with the students was interpreted as "a Declaration of Independence" from the rest of the university senior management and caused a rift between Professor Mayosi and management, but he had no concrete evidence of senior management's position of the issue:

Mine is a reflection of his conversations with me where he described the amount of backlash he received at one on the SLG's meetings. He said he was taken aback by the reaction. You know he was genuinely shocked. The Faculty of Health was clearly taking a stand and saying we are not doing security, and we are marching against this thing; and this created a gulf now with the official approach. And so the march to Bremner is now a major crack—there is no doubt about it.

Other interviewees shared examples from their observations of reactions to the choices Professor Mayosi made when he decided to embrace the students' demands and to show his support publicly in the way he did. An interviewee described hearing senior members criticizing his decision to march with students and discussing his participation in the march in unfavourable terms. Complaints also came from his colleagues at the FHS:

He couldn't win in the eyes of management here ... In the eyes of some in the deanery, in the time of the student protests, there was unhappiness about some of his decisions ... He was working Monday to Sunday. He was working all sorts of hours and he to some extent I think, expected the deanery to be on board with that kind of work ethic, of "we need to do what we need to do to sort out these things" and I think initially people came to the party, but this wasn't a one-week protest. This was quite extended and so I think the attacking nature of the students at that point in time started taking a toll on people.

Taking everything into consideration – efforts to end the occupation of the deanery, the crisis that the Faculty faced as the end of the year approached, the legitimacy of the students’ grievances, the pressure (and probably the desire) to take a stand – the decision to march would have been one of strategic importance for Professor Mayosi, and in some way an expression of hope that peace would be restored. Yet this became, according to one of his colleagues, “the moment where things break down” because of the criticism he received as a result of his publicly visible support of students’ demands. Professor Mayosi’s own words cited earlier from an interview with one of his colleagues that he felt as if he was alone “in a dark room” with bombs exploding from all sides convey his feeling of isolation because of the positions he took towards the end of the year when his Faculty was faced with several crises.

The panel would like to end this section discussing what some of his colleagues saw as the beginning of the downward spiral in Professor Mayosi’s experience of his position of leadership with a quote that captures and sums up the extraordinary circumstances that Professor Mayosi was confronted with:

So his decisions – around the exams, the mini-semester, joining the march – were [strategic], compromise decisions. But they also meant that the students didn’t get what they wanted, and the faculty didn’t get what they wanted. And both were upset. So that sort of thing ... One of the big problems was that even when decisions – and there is a gazillion emails he had to attend to – even when decisions are made at DMC, whether they are in favour of these decisions or not, but there is no way of communicating with anybody and everything just comes back to him. Everything just comes back to him.

### Observations and Reflections by Senior Black Academic Staff

The interviews the panel conducted included a wide range of members of the UCT community. In interviews with academic staff in positions of leadership, the panel was interested in the question of how they experienced the tumultuous period of the students' protests at UCT. There are two sets of responses that the panel would like to focus on in this section. One has to do with the subtlety of racism, what senior black academic staff experience as an apparent promotion of the full participation of black staff in senior positions, while at the same time this is often met with a "push-back" once black staff begin to emerge as serious scholars worthy of recognition. In the literature of diversity and inclusion, this has been termed the "backlash phenomenon".

The second aspect of the responses from this group of academics that the panel will engage with evaluatively is the "problem" of black excellence itself—a "problem" because the experience and recognition of one's excellence may be accompanied by an underlying assumption that all that matters is exerting oneself and working hard. This issue will be addressed now, and will then be followed by a discussion of the "backlash phenomenon".

Black professionals in areas dominated by white colleagues recognise the challenges that have historically constrained black advancement. Increasingly, however, black people want to assert themselves, to exercise their freedom and to engage their sense of agency in order to transcend these race-bound constraints. The evidence seems to suggest, therefore, that through hard work, and hard work alone, one can prove that black people are capable of achieving excellence: "I reached this

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<sup>8</sup>Darren Baker & Elisabeth Kelan, (2019). *Splitting and Blaming: The Psychic Life of Neoliberal Executive Women*. *Human Relations*, 72(1), 69–97.

level through my hard work, despite being black. I am the agent of my own success.” Some, it has been argued, go so far as to repudiate the fact of enduring structural inequality and maintain that all one needs to do is to work hard.<sup>8</sup> Darren Baker & Elisabeth Kelan (2019) have examined this question why some individuals who have had remarkable achievements through hard work tend to downplay the significance of factors such as racism and transgenerational privilege.

These studies show that a focus exclusively on the perception that one’s sense of agency to pursue excellence trumps any other forces that may threaten one’s progress throws up new challenges when one is confronted with the forces that thwart the upward trajectory of one’s work. Structural forces may still affect an individual’s progress toward reaching a certain goal, and a complex set of factors that frustrates the person’s rise may arise, sometimes related to the negative evaluation by a senior who does not support transformation goals. Thus, the broader issues of *institutional culture* and structural inequality are implicated; Professor Mayosi understood this clearly in the way he relentlessly pursued opportunities for young black scholars. One of the senior members of academic staff we interviewed captured the problem of pursuing black excellence in the face of hostile structural forces in the following way, referencing Professor Mayosi’s experience:

Bongani grasped this language of excellence and so on—I mean I too grasped that language and I believe in excellence ... we shared the promotion of black scholarship and black scholarship that would be competitive. But I was also mindful of the politics. The example that I used to illustrate [the limitations of relying only on one’s excellence] was to point out that liberals, the British in particular, made us believe that we could be civilized, right? But with time it became clear that however civilised you are, you would never be like them.



Another dramatic illustration of the intransigence of structural forces is reflected in a quote by the participant who pointed out that the moment a senior black academic staff member is in a position to bring about transformation, and actually *shows* that they can do it, then the person “is not given the capacity to change these structures—and then you are doomed.” The following powerful imagery captures this feeling of doom most poignantly: “It is like the sun that would...on the other side of the mountain, that would keep on receding as you think you’re getting closer to it.”

The panel finds it important to note that from Professor Mayosi’s record of leadership in promoting black excellence—and some of the interviews the panel conducted attest to this fact—it seems clear that he understood how powerful structural racism can be in thwarting serious efforts to promote young black scholars and to advance black-led research at a global level. For this reason he knew that his position of leadership was crucial for the vision of meaningful transformation within his faculty and at UCT. The panel is of the view that Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, at the time the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) for Research and Internationalisation, saw this role of Professor Mayosi very clearly when she decided to propose a new position for him in which he would lead the Africa Centre of Excellence in Poverty. This issue is discussed more comprehensively in Chapter 5, but in this section the panel simply wants to point out the recognition, at the highest level of UCT management, of Professor Mayosi’s leadership in transforming a predominantly white male academic environment by creating opportunities for the advancement of young black scholars. The efforts by Professor Phakeng to create a new leadership position for Professor Mayosi was, in the panel’s view, a single but striking illustration of the critical importance of black leadership in positions that matter at “historically white” institutions such as UCT.

The panel found evidence of Professor Phakeng's extraordinary effort to position Professor Mayosi strategically for the advancement of black excellence at UCT in an interview with a member of staff at the FHS. In the interview, the staff member explained how the staff member was approached to assist the DVC with writing a motivation for the position of Pro-Vice Chancellor that would be linked to a new Africa Centre of Excellence in Poverty in preparation for the Council Exco meeting of July 2018. Professor Mayosi's input was needed to accompany the motivation for the position, and the staff member shared a memory of Professor Mayosi's enthusiasm to write up the research plan for the Centre: "You know how he used to say 'yes, yes, yes, yes, don't worry' and he said to me, 'I'll definitely do it. It's almost there. I'm going to write it and I'll send it through to you,' he said."

The panel found this vision of establishing a senior position commensurate with the stature of Professor Mayosi an important illustration of addressing not only the race issue in the academy but also supporting these efforts at the level where it matters. Professor Mayosi tried to work within the institution to effect meaningful change. However, in the end,

he came to realise that the institutions that he trusted can turn against him. It was turning against him, because now that very system was saying to him "you are incompetent, we are going to expose you". The pressures that he was under [did not matter] and his capability as a scholar was being questioned at a time when he was getting prizes at an international level.

A powerful reminder of how Professor Mayosi's legacy continues profoundly to affect the broader discourse on cardiac research is his distinguished international research achievements and stature of global excellence. The discovery in 2017 of a heart attack gene by an international research team that was led by Professor Mayosi serves to illustrate this

point. Professor Mayosi referred to the discovery as “a first in the world – on our soil” and “probably the biggest breakthrough in South African cardiology since Dr. Chris Barnard’s first heart transplant.

It is possible that these reactions are part of what has been termed the “backlash phenomenon” in the literature. It is worth pointing out that there were reports from our interviews of voices of dissent when Professor Mayosi was appointed as Head of the Department of Internal Medicine, and these voices re-emerged when he was appointed Dean. It was clear from some of the interviews that the displeasure with Professor Mayosi’s senior appointment still lingered even after his passing.

The “backlash phenomenon” is a reaction associated with the constraints and criticisms that emerge in the context of institutional transformation strategies. The subtleties and complexities of racially charged dynamics that emerge when organisations are trying to implement diversity and inclusion programmes have been addressed by several scholars. For example, Daria Roythmayr (2014, p. 7) writes that without constant vigilance on the part of decision makers in organisations that seek transformation, racial gaps and inequality becomes “locked in” in cycles of repetition because they are

produced by the everyday decisions that structure our social, political, and economic interactions. Put another way, racial inequality may now have become ‘locked-in’ .... Thus, past inequality has paved the way in each new generation for continuing inequality. Advantage has become self-reinforcing ....

In their examination of this phenomenon in the context of white participants in diversity and inclusion training programmes, Deborah Kidder, Melenie Lankau, Donna Chrobot-Mason et al. (2004) describe backlash as negative reactions to change, and that these reactions are

experienced by traditionally higher status majority group members when they believe that traditionally lower status minority group members have received preferential treatment.

Overall, the general research trends have shown evidence of low support among whites for policies intended to reduce inequality between blacks and whites at a range of institutions. There are echoes of these research trends in some of the experiences recounted by senior academic staff interviewed by the panel for this report. One of the interviewees used vivid language to illustrate the withdrawal of support of senior black faculty staff members by their senior white colleagues as the sun that would “keep on receding as you think you’re getting closer to it.”



## CHAPTER 4

### THE IMPACT OF MULTIPLE STRESSORS ON PROFESSOR MAYOSI AND COMPOUNDING FACTORS

In this chapter, we will use the term “mental health” in the way that it has been used in the report of the Faculty of Health Science’s Mental Health Working Group (MHWG), which highlights the impact of the stressful environment of the Faculty on the students in the aftermath of Professor Mayosi’s passing. The panel notes that while it is not in a position to speak authoritatively about Professor’s Mayosi’s psychological state of mind, the panel is able to comment on the impact over time of the multiple stressors on Professor Mayosi’s visible behaviour as observed by his colleagues during his tenure as dean of Health Sciences Faculty.

#### **Mental health challenges among students and staff at UCT**

The panel notes that mental health challenges at UCT are addressed in Chapter 8 of the Report of The Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission (IRTC)<sup>9</sup>. The IRT Commission began its work in February 2018 following the negotiated agreement that was concluded on 7 November 2016. The agreement was signed between the Executive of the University, Students’ Representative Council (SRC) members, and other student organisations and formations that took part in the protests that unfolded at UCT during 2015 and 2016. This paved the way for the writing of examinations and the salvaging of the 2016 academic year.

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<sup>9</sup> IRTC report

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The chapter in the IRTC report cites findings from various sources that confirm that mental health is a major social and health challenge in South Africa. These included the findings from the World Health Organization (WHO) Mental Health Survey conducted for the period 2002 to 2004, which found that 26.5% respondents in South Africa were diagnosed with mental disorders classified as severe, while 31.1% had moderate symptoms of mental disorders. The most common disorders were major depression disorder (4.9%) and alcohol abuse or dependence (4.5%). Findings from the WHO identify depression as currently the third biggest disease globally. If this is the case, it goes without saying that efforts at public awareness and education are not only needed, but imperative.

While the IRTC chapter mainly focuses on mental health challenges faced by the student population at UCT, it does make an observation that protest action during #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall left the entire university population feeling unsettled and traumatised. “Both students and staff members asserted that they still get haunted by traumatic memories of violence that took place during the protest”, and this remained true nearly two years after the dust seemed to have settled. Leaving the protests aside, it would, however, appear that it was the violence between the police and private security guards and the protesting students that caused both staff and students to feel even more unsafe and fearful for their lives. Sadly, the acts of brutality that called into question the use of private security companies and police at UCT were not isolated incidents. There were also reports that carnage ensued at two campuses of the University of Free State (UFS). This was as a result of the deployment of private security guards who were called in to contain violent student protests. The institution called for an independent panel to investigate their conduct and offer recommendations.

Multiple respondents from the Faculty of Health Sciences who appeared before the panel talked about how unsafe they had felt operating within the context of the student protests, and what an anxiety-provoking environment the protest action created. They cited the occupation of the deanery, the pressure from

students to have their demands resolved quickly, and the verbal and physical assaults as examples, to give a flavour of what the prevailing atmosphere was, and why it would have been challenging for anyone, even if they were emotionally stable, not to be adversely affected by the emotional hardship that accompanied the protest actions.

When it became apparent that many students were presenting with emotional problems, a student care line was established. However, nothing was put in place to address the increasing levels of trauma among staff members, particularly those who bore the brunt of the protest action and were on the receiving end of the students' increasing frustration and anger. A message to the campus community from the desk of the Vice-Chancellor (VC) on 19 September 2016 gives a glimpse of the atmosphere at the time: "Thursday and Friday last week were traumatic for many of us – particularly the confrontational disruption of the classes and tests, the invasion of private space, the rudeness and insulting behaviour of some of the protesters, and the difficulty of cancelling classes and having to reschedule. I understand what you are going through and empathise with you ... I trust that you will support each other." The question that must be asked is whether "supporting each other" was at all possible, given the tensions that the prevailing environment would have created.

In addition to the above, the IRTC report cited institutional racism, the slow pace of transformation, and discrimination as major stressors that have an impact on black academic staff. Professor Mayosi's passing was quoted as an example of why more needed to have been done to support staff in terms of mental health.

It is important to note that the Faculty of Health Science's Mental Health Working Group (MHWG)<sup>10</sup> issued a report in April 2019 in response

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<sup>10</sup> Faculty of Health Sciences "Mental Health working Group" April 2019

to a request from the deanery to make recommendations on how the faculty might best respond to student needs regarding mental health and well-being. Again, while staff members were interviewed or made submissions to the working group, the focus of the inquiry was on undergraduate students and not much was reported about the mental health and well-being of staff. It is puzzling that there was this omission even though this group's work was commissioned immediately after Professor Mayosi's passing. The panel was left wondering why no one was making a connection between the students' wellness or lack thereof, and the psychological status of those responsible for their education. Given the comments from the former VC of 19 September 2016, where he acknowledged the trauma that both students and staff were going through and the need for support for all involved, it is puzzling that staff emotional wellness as the basis for a healthy educational environment where all can thrive, seem not to have been given the same priority. It was interesting to hear one respondent admitting that they don't talk about health promotion as a faculty. "We like to teach our students, but we don't talk about our need for psychological support".

### **A Tragic End and Some Critical Questions and Observations**

It would be impossible – and is outside this panel's remit – to conclude what actually led Professor Mayosi, an academic leader of great distinction, renowned cardiologist, a son, husband and father, tragically to take his own life on Friday, 27 July 2018. This chapter, while it attempts to piece together a few strands to make sense of the reported personal and professional challenges at the time, will undoubtedly not suffice to soothe the souls of those who are still reeling from the impact of his untimely passing.

Perhaps the only contribution the panel can make, through reviewing and bringing to light the statements concerning the impact of these



challenges on his performance, is to assist the University of Cape Town to understand the context into which Professor Mayosi was thrust, the unexpected challenges that confronted him, the extent of his suffering as evidenced by his attempts at resignation and how the university can best respond to similar cases in the future.

One of the first difficulties one encounters when trying to understand the issue is the time it took for Professor Mayosi's mental health struggles to be acknowledged. However, as the testimony of interviewees suggests, the fact that he was billed as a super-human, who was infallible in the eyes of many, may have blinded people to his accumulative struggles. It is also possible that some colleagues who may have wanted to support him emotionally could not have fully grasped the extent of his pain, as they were not close enough to him or spend enough time with him to witness the shifts in his moods. Complicating this picture is the fact that the onset of his emotional difficulties is hard to pin down, as different people were informed of his mental health struggles at different times. Family members reported to the panel that he had no psychiatric condition prior to the time he assumed the position of dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences. In this view, the only conclusion to be drawn is that it was the circumstances surrounding his deanship as well as the student protests that triggered and compounded his emotional decline (see chapter 3).

The panel was told that he was given sick leave for six weeks in late 2016. A close colleague stated that when he had a breakdown he did go for counselling within the church and also saw a psychologist and a psychiatrist who put him on medication. Even with these interventions colleagues reported that something was seriously amiss and he was no longer the man they knew him to be – the remarkable man who was known to “turn everything he touched into gold”.

The other worrying factor is that throughout this period he was treated as though nothing was amiss. Duties were assigned as though it was business as usual, but when he failed to deliver on tasks he was blamed and chastised by colleagues. There is evidence that reports were made behind his back to his supervisors to complain about the lack of leadership in the faculty.

Given the above, the panellists had to consider whether it was his increasing work demands, his worsening mental health or the less-than-ideal social support he was offered, or a combination of these factors, that led to his demise. They found themselves asking the following questions:

- Is it possible that his growing public profile and achievements led to a creeping alienation from his social base? (How do people counsel you, when they are admirers who think you are larger than life and virtually infallible?) In other words, with his history of great success and achievements it must have been nearly impossible to view him as someone in need of help.
- Is it possible that the monumental demands and growing success left little space for him to receive social support from peers who regarded him as a model of perfection and above reproach?
- Why was the informal support that other leaders had benefitted from not readily available to him? Is it because he gave an impression that he was self-reliant and that inadvertently meant he found himself alienated from those who could have supported him at his time of need?
- Given the limited facts at the panel's disposal, could it be concluded that the tensions and the environment in which he operated made it difficult for him to continuously seek and receive support?
- Is it possible that it was the powerlessness of those above and around Professor Mayosi that led to a lack of decisive intervention in his struggles?

- Could it be possible that institutional racism, conscious or unconscious, played a role in his alienation and consequent suffering? Given what was said by a number of the black academics who were interviewed, it would be remiss of the panel not to consider the history of institutional racism and its impact on Professor Mayosi's tenure as a black academic at UCT.

These questions are not intended to suggest that Prof Mayosi did not seek assistance from those he trusted and were close to him, instead they are meant to highlight the complex challenges of the environment in which he was operating.

### **Professor Mayosi before and during his Tenure and Signs of Unwellness**

Examples were given in the panel interviews that Professor Mayosi had changed so much from the person people knew before – that he was sleeping in meetings, was avoiding emotionally charged encounters, was becoming more and more conflict averse, had developed a “stutter”, was not honouring important speaking engagements, would stare into space, and was found once or twice slumped over his desk. One respondent said he was no longer the man who would “walk into a room and wow everybody with his incisive eloquence”. Some described how he had lost what seemed to have been his trademark, the “gift of the gab”, his confidence as a speaker, and his ability to give the outward impression that he knew what he was doing and was in control. There were reports that he blamed himself and took responsibility for matters that were clearly out of his control and not of his making.

A case in point was a student admissions debacle in January/February of 2018 where the admissions machinery of the faculty malfunctioned so badly that a large number of unsuccessful applicants received letters of acceptance by mistake. Professor Mayosi took personal responsibility for this, even though it was not his job to admit students. The blunder

occurred at a very sensitive time when Professor Mayosi appeared to be struggling emotionally and was under increasing scrutiny of his performance and effectiveness as a leader. It was also a time when a fragmented and traumatised Faculty of Health Sciences was still dealing with students' demands emanating from #OccupyFHS and general agitation for transformation and social justice.

The panel was told that it was around this period that his depression and mental health challenges intensified to a point where he sought assistance from a second psychiatrist. Yet the incident also highlighted another side of Professor Mayosi who, having accepted responsibility for the calamity, worked his fingers to the bone trying to fix the mess. He dedicated himself to smoothing ruffled feathers and mollifying angry parents and applicants. The panel was told, sometimes with grudging admiration, of the hours that he spent on the phone, asking other universities to find places on their second- and third-choice applicants' lists to add the ones rejected by UCT, and reporting regularly to individual parents, no doubt saving UCT from embarrassing headlines. There is no doubt that this added more psychological pressure to a person whose threshold of resilience at this point was shaky.

In addition to the above, respondents shared various other episodes which give an impression of someone who was struggling emotionally, and in need of serious intervention:

- The panel was told of an incident in October or November 2016 where Professor Mayosi was to address members of the Western Cape Government, including the mayor of Cape Town and the MEC of Health, at a hotel in the city. He did not show up and was found sitting in his car at a car park nearby and staring into space. He was granted some time off, but did not take full advantage of it.
- While he was attending the Pan-African Society of Cardiology (PASCAR) heart conference in Egypt in late 2016, a colleague

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who was at the conference with him reported that he was having problems speaking and was shaking

- In London, following the visit to Egypt, Professor Mayosi again did not arrive at a session in which he was scheduled to participate. A family friend who was dispatched to locate him found him in his hotel room, apparently after he had been walking around the streets of the city.
- On his return from London he revealed to his wife (for the first time) that he was seeing a psychiatrist. He was put off work for six weeks as stated above.
- There was a report that on one occasion he was found sitting in his chair in his office, slumped forward on his desk with his head on his folded arms. He did not respond to questions, and on waking up appeared disoriented.
- Another episode in his office was reported, where he stood up to give a paper to a colleague and suffered a dizzy spell and lost his balance. After he had been made comfortable and his wife, Professor Khumalo, had been called, the decision was taken to admit him into a local hospital to undergo a series of tests.

These examples paint a picture of a suffering and struggling individual who in all probability would have benefitted both from uninterrupted rest and consistent therapeutic intervention.

There are also reports though that he continued burning the “midnight oil” and was not resting. He would respond to emails or communicate with colleagues in the middle of the night. Family members report that he was not sleeping well. This was supported by comments from respondents who observed that he was falling asleep in meetings, and appeared as though he was not sleeping enough or was overmedicated. The environment in which he was operating, which was imbued with unrelenting student protests and demands, strained relationships in

the deanery, struggles in obtaining sufficient support and internal and external work pressures, may have exacerbated his already compromised emotional health.

### **Why Professor Mayosi's Observed Behaviour Should have Caused Concern**

Research done by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) shows that although the majority of people who have depression do not die by suicide, having major depression increases suicide risk compared to people without depression. They conclude that death by suicide may, in part, be related to the severity of the depression. HHS estimates that 60% of people who commit suicide have had a mood disorder (e.g. major depression, bipolar disorder and dysthymia).

The evidence shared by many with the panel clearly points to the fact that Professor Mayosi was not coping emotionally. . This was confirmed by his admission to hospital following a panic attack and his own admission that he was seeing a psychiatrist and was taking antidepressants. His unwellness is further confirmed by the episodes listed above, the change in his disposition over time, and the fact that he had sought various ways to relieve himself of the duties that seemed to weigh heavily on him.

It would, however, appear that UCT, as an institution, failed to acknowledge that it was dealing with a person who for all intents and purposes was not well and was not able to make rational decisions. Even though he mentioned to close colleagues that he was depressed and was being treated by a psychiatrist, there is no evidence that appropriate interventions took place or that support was provided, nor is there clear proof that his condition was communicated through channels up the hierarchy.

By this, the panel is not ignoring the existence of wellness facilities at UCT. Indeed, the panel proceeds from an assumption that wellness facilities exist at all universities, supporting both staff and students in matters of physical and mental wellness. The question that perplexed the panel, and which may be misunderstood as an indictment of institutional wellness provision, is a different one. Simply put, it is how, in an institution like UCT, and in a faculty like Health Sciences, the escalating distress of someone occupying a position of leadership – increasingly visible to a number of people – could have continued without reaching the attention of people who could have intervened. Perhaps there is no ready answer to the question. But, with an eye on the future of this great institution, it appears to be worth posing.

Considering the myriad of complex factors reported here, and the emotion challenges that Professor Mayosi endured, questions remain to be asked about the appropriate support to ensure the safety and success of UCT staff members, especially black academics in leadership positions.



## CHAPTER 5

### ATTEMPTED RESIGNATION(S) AND THE FALSE DAWN OF REDEPLOYMENT

This chapter attempts to trace the build-up to the tragedy, through the prism of two clusters of events that took place in the last months of Professor Mayosi's deanship. The two sets of events are discussed together because the link between them seems evident. Professor Mayosi wished to terminate his tenure as dean, as evidenced by his one recorded attempt to resign and several reported instances of his growing unhappiness in the post. At some point, it appeared that he would get his wish through redeployment to a research post, until that particular plan fell through.

#### **Professor Mayosi's Resignation(s)**

According to the recollections of some interviewees, Professor Mayosi had tried at least twice to resign from the position of dean. Some would have it as more than twice but then one needs to be clear whether reference is being made to formal letters of resignation, or other kinds of engagements between Professor Mayosi and the executive leadership around the stresses of the deanship during an extremely challenging time. In the view of the panel there are at least two cases that are backed by credible evidence that Professor Mayosi tried to leave the deanship. Needless to say, this discussion is an important one since it is common cause that there were suggestions from a number of stakeholders that Professor Mayosi had on several occasions tried to resign, to no avail.



These suggestions invariably carried an accusatory undertone imputing to the institution some culpability for the continuation of the pressures on Professor Mayosi even when he had sought relief by attempting to relinquish his post. The panel thus dedicated a great deal of attention to the issue of Professor Mayosi's reported resignation(s).

The clearest evidence in existence is that of the resignation that was contained in an email from Professor Mayosi to the-then Vice-Chancellor (VC), Dr Max Price, dated Friday, 3 November 2017. In that email, under the subject line "Resignation as Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences", he wrote:

*"Dear Max*

*I have decided to resign my position as Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences. I believe that the faculty deserves better leadership than I have been able to provide in the past year. I am sorry to do this in the middle of a crisis. I will ask Dr Reno Morar to act as Dean while I await your decision.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Bongani Mayosi"*

The panel had the benefit of seeing both the resignation email from Professor Mayosi and a confidential document on the matter prepared by Dr Price at the request of Associate Professor Lis Lange, Professor Mayosi's line manager at the time of his passing.

In the document, Dr Price makes the following points:

- This was the only resignation from Professor Mayosi that he was aware of. Dr Price referred to it as "an apparent resignation" because of what follows below.

- The “precipitating incident” appeared to have been a difficult meeting the day before Professor Mayosi wrote the email.
- Professor Mayosi’s resignation was not refused. He withdrew it voluntarily and, moreover, requested that the matter be treated as confidential.
- In the process a framework plan was devised, with Professor Mayosi’s concurrence, according to which he would receive immediate respite from some management functions, coupled with some longer-term interventions to ease his deanship burden.

The importance of these documents lies in the fact that they throw light, at least in part, on this sensitive area. Dr Price made it clear in his interview with the panel that he wished the record to be set straight on this – that he did not refuse Professor Mayosi’s resignation but that instead, after discussion, Professor Mayosi had withdrawn it voluntarily. Moreover, according to Dr Price, Professor Mayosi had requested Dr Price not to tell anyone about the resignation. In his document, Dr Price reveals that he had consulted Dr Morar and Professor Sue Kidson on Professor Mayosi’s email, and had later also informed Professor Hugh Corder, who was Professor Mayosi’s line manager at that time.

The matter of the “precipitating incident” deserves some explanation. In his document, Dr Price states that upon receiving the resignation email on 3 November 2017, he contacted Dr Morar to find out what might have triggered Professor Mayosi’s action. Dr Morar’s response (also now set out in writing in an annexure to Dr Price’s report to Associate Professor Lange) was that the day before, on Thursday, 2 November, Professor Mayosi, the Dean Team and the Dean’s Advisory Committee met to plan for a meeting with student activists who were insisting on knowing what had been done about their demands of October 2016, which had been the subject of the agreement that eventually ended the occupation of the deanery, thus drawing to a close the protest actions of that year. As it

happened, there were quite a number of demands that had not yet been addressed, chief among which was the demand to review the curriculum and matters related to such a review. The students had insisted on a report-back to the whole faculty at an open forum of staff and students scheduled for the following day, 3 November.

At a later meeting with students on the same Thursday evening, Professor Mayosi had agreed to the cancellation of classes and the waiving of DP requirements in order to enable the students to attend the forum. This agreement directly contradicted an earlier decision by the Dean's Advisory Committee and the heads of departments, which had already been communicated to the faculty, that DP requirements would not be waived. Professor Mayosi is reported to have told Dr Morar and Professor Kidson that he felt he had made a serious mistake by giving in to the student demands. On the morning of 3 November, Professor Mayosi telephoned Dr Morar to inform him that he would not be attending the forum, and requested him to chair the meeting. According to the timing established, he must have sent his resignation email to Dr Price soon after that.

It should also be noted that Dr Price ventured to explain in his document why he felt that a discussion with Professor Mayosi was called for, as opposed to him routinely accepting the resignation. According to Dr Price:

- He accepted advice from Dr Morar and Professor Kidson that the direness of the “precipitating incident” that Professor Mayosi appears to have dreaded had essentially fizzled out, as the matter was resolved within the faculty without too much upheaval.
- He was of the opinion that the wording and tone of Professor Mayosi's email did not suggest an overwhelming desire to leave but rather a need to test whether the institution still had confidence in him.

- He brought to Professor Mayosi's attention the negative reactions that could attend such an abrupt departure and at this particular time (ie no notice period, no succession plan, and generally a perception that he was "running away").
- Professor Mayosi got an opportunity to discuss frankly his challenges at FHS, and to begin to visualise and formulate a tentative plan for a more measured and planned departure in the coming year or so.

The availability of written documents on the matter of this resignation was a great help in assessing the incident as a whole. In particular, it afforded the Executive an opportunity to explain its motivations and intentions, and to put certain matters of detail (eg dates) beyond doubt. Crucially, the Dr Price document and the annexure from Dr Morar place on record the formal response of the Executive to the question on the lips of many: "Why was the resignation refused?". And according to these documents the answer from the Executive is clear: "The resignation was not refused – it was withdrawn by Professor Mayosi and, moreover, he requested that the fact that the attempt had been made should be kept confidential." This is contained in Dr Price's document, which the panel has seen, without of course having had the benefit of hearing Professor Mayosi's side of the story.

While this disposed of the formal question and answer, there remained some scope for further questions. One arose directly from persistent testimony to the panel that Professor Mayosi was by this time feeling the strain and really wanted to leave. The panel was told by those closest to him that he was "in a bad place" and experiencing "an increasing sense of isolation" from colleagues at various levels. In the words of one interviewee, the "angry people" he was terrified of confronting "were not the students", they were close colleagues of his in an environment that had become "hostile, abrasive, aggressive and rude". It is not possible to ignore such testimony. (Further on this, see Chapter 3). If this was indeed

the case, it surely would have taken a lot to persuade Professor Mayosi to change his mind, a notion that led some interviewees to speculate that he might have been coerced into withdrawing his resignation. The panel has found no formal oral or written evidence of this. The panel is, however, open to some views expressed by interviewees, that Professor Mayosi's well-known high sense of duty to UCT would have been a factor in any decision that he took on this matter.

Moreover, if these reported perceptions even remotely represent an aspect of Professor Mayosi's reality at the time, then one can also understand the nagging concern among friends and relations about how the Executive could have failed to pick this up. This, however, is only the tip of the iceberg. The bigger question, explored more fully in Chapter 4, is how the institutional community as a whole failed to pick up on Professor Mayosi's increasing distress. This is not to apportion blame but, clearly, had there been early detection of his condition, it is fair to assume that something would have been done to alleviate it.

Linked to this, and pertinent to the question of resignation, is whether Dr Price's reasoning around the language and tone of Professor Mayosi's resignation email might have been different if he had been aware of Professor Mayosi's real distress. Such awareness might have coloured the Vice-Chancellor's interpretation of the resignation as a "test" of whether he still had the confidence of the Executive and of his colleagues. It might have provided an additional dimension to Professor Mayosi's letter and given pause for thought before attributing to him such a lucid and rational motive as sending a resignation letter as a test of whether he was still in good standing. But in the absence of such awareness, of course, there was nothing in the letter itself that provided an obvious clue. And Professor Mayosi's reported participation in the discussion which followed, which was about the options available to ease the pressures on him, would seem to endorse the taking of his letter at face value.

A final question, raised by some of the panel's interviewees, is what happened to the support promised to Professor Mayosi as part of the deal that persuaded him to withdraw his resignation. According to the information shared with the panel, that deal had included the revival of a long-standing intention to have an organisational review of the Deanery, conducted by an independent external reviewer. Indeed the plan had been agreed to as part of the response to the student demands of 2016. The same thinking was now revived in a discussion between Professor Mayosi, Dr Price and Dr Morar on measures to take some of the load off Professor Mayosi, so that he could concentrate on strategic matters. The intervention of Emeritus Professor Cyril O'Connor, to conduct an internal organisational review, was discussed in this regard, and agreed. Also, as part of the discussion, Professor Mayosi is reported to have been keen on a cohort of middle management to be at the forefront of implementation of many of the faculty's policies, a process that would enlist the services of senior faculty staff. Unfortunately, it is unclear what the outcome of Professor O'Connor's intervention was, or what happened in the case of the other proposals. As stated earlier in this report, a general call to the institution by the panel right at the outset, and repeated to the panel's interviewees, to direct the panel to relevant written materials did not always produce the desired results. Efforts by the panel to secure a detailed account of what transpired from Professor O'Connor's review and other proposals yielded copies of emails written mainly by Dr Morar and Prof O'Connor seemingly to Professor Mayosi concerning the review process with staff. Reference is made in the emails to "an outcome of the process", however, there is no evidence in these emails of what the outcome of the process was.

As to the possibility of any other formal resignation, the evidence is scanty, consisting mainly of rumours and hearsay accounts.

There is stronger testimony of a second attempt in or around March 2018, in the form of a reported conversation between Professor Mayosi and one of his close colleagues. This interviewee recalled that this was after a University Assembly in which one of the co-chairs had had the microphone snatched from her in a rowdy meeting, much to Professor Mayosi's disappointment. The panel was told that a despondent Professor Mayosi again attempted to vacate his post, sharing this information with the interviewee, and reporting that he had been persuaded by the Vice-Chancellor to delay his departure for a while longer.

The reasons advanced, according to this interviewee, were largely about maintaining institutional stability, in the face of Dr Price's imminent departure as Vice-Chancellor at the end of June, and the fact that the Executive team were all new, with many other senior posts (e.g. faculty deanships) occupied by acting incumbents. This version was corroborated by the evidence of another colleague who, similarly, had had private discussions with Professor Mayosi about the same matter, though not about the details. The testimony given by these two interviewees is hard to dismiss. What remains unclear is whether this incident falls into the category referred to by Dr Price as social occasions not amounting to formal resignations but rather conducted as general discussions of the heavy load of the deanship. There is no written record of this incident.

One more interaction between Professor Mayosi and the Executive bears mention. This was reported to the panel by Professor Nonhlanhla Khumalo who stated that on 4 July 2018 her husband went to see Associate Professor Lange, his line manager, seeking clearance to take his accumulated sabbatical leave, as a prelude to resigning. The sabbatical period would afford him an opportunity to arrange faculty matters to his satisfaction. She recalled that on his return from the meeting, it was not clear what had transpired. Professor Khumalo naturally surmised that his request for sabbatical had been denied. There is a suggestion that

the reason the sabbatical conversation never continued was because it coincided with a wish by the Vice-Chancellor to see Professor Mayosi with the aim of putting to him the pro-vice-chancellor option. Professor Mayosi's report on the meeting was so uncharacteristically imprecise that Professor Khumalo said she took the unusual step of writing to Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, now Vice-Chancellor, to seek an appointment. Professor Phakeng said she could see them the following day, 5 July. In Professor Khumalo's mind, she and Professor Mayosi would see the Vice-Chancellor together but, on the day, he phoned to say that he would handle the interaction on his own. She thought it wiser not to insist on accompanying him. It was on this day that the Vice-Chancellor first broached the subject of the pro vice-chancellorship (more below).

Professor Khumalo reported that she has often been troubled since then by the question as to what reasons might have led to the sabbatical issue not being concluded, since she believed that Professor Mayosi had accumulated such leave and clearly needed it in order to transform the vision of the PVC position into a concrete plan and develop a comprehensive proposal.

### **The Pro Vice-Chancellor issue**

The other prominent issue that bedevils discussion of the last days of Professor Mayosi is the matter of the reported proposal to appoint him as a scholar to lead a Centre of Excellence at UCT. It appears to be common knowledge that an exit plan for Professor Mayosi was mooted around the second half of 2017 or early in 2018.

According to Professor Phakeng, she made the early running on this matter, at the time when she was still Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC). Spurred on by repeated reports from various quarters that all was not well with Professor Mayosi's tenure, she began to give some thought to the



matter of his possible redeployment. Some of these reports of concern came during Professor Phakeng's routine handover engagements with Associate Professor Lange, when Professor Phakeng was Vice-Chancellor Designate, others through incidents such as a consistency check meeting during the annual performance assessment cycle, where she recalled that (together with two others) Professor Mayosi was initially discussed as one of the deans "not meeting" their key performance indicators. This designation was ultimately discarded during the discussion.

Perhaps influenced somewhat by an earlier conversation with colleagues who had pointed out that there was no chair of cardiovascular medicine at UCT, Professor Phakeng had begun to look into the possibility of a Centre of Excellence at UCT in diseases of poverty. It was also important to find a rationale for doing this, and for identifying Professor Mayosi as the head of such a project. In her explorations, Professor Phakeng had approached several people, including Associate Professor Lange and Dr Price as the outgoing Vice-Chancellor. Officials at the National Research Foundation (NRF) and at the Medical Research Council (MRC) had also been canvassed. Internally, Professor Phakeng had had some consultations with senior professors at the FHS, including some who may have had the qualifications to express an interest in heading up the planned centre. Professor Phakeng reported that all the people contacted were positive about the plan and were supportive.

In a conversation between Professor Phakeng and Dr Price on 18 June 2018, the latter mentioned Professor Mayosi's attempted resignation in 2017 and, at her request, forwarded the resignation email to her. At this point she decided to seek an appointment with Professor Mayosi to talk about his future. She sent him a WhatsApp note to that effect. He agreed, and they met for dinner at a restaurant near the university on 20 June. Professor Phakeng outlined her thinking, which was to establish a Centre of Excellence at UCT, to be headed by Professor Mayosi. In

its conception, it was to be a continental, not purely local, project in partnership with the NRF, the MRC and the Department of Health, and in line with UCT's vision to engage in research with continental relevance.

This was in part to play to Professor Mayosi's strengths, with his Africa-wide research networks and profile. He would head the work of the partnership and would be appointed as a Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) because of the vastness of the task, where he would be expected to coordinate the project at faculty, national and African Union (AU) level. There was no shortage of precedent relating to the appointment of pro vice-chancellors at UCT, as exemplified by the existing pro vice-chancellorships in the African Climate and Development Initiative (ACDI) and the Poverty and Inequality Initiative (PII). Throughout all this, it was understood that Professor Mayosi would, in a sense, have to write his own job description by developing the proposal to go with the application to the NRF for a SARChI Chair.

Professor Phakeng reported that Professor Mayosi agreed, citing his passion for diseases of the poor, for which he had earlier coined the phrase "the bottom billion". The two of them then began to discuss strategy, which included getting the Department of Health on board, and how the plan would be rolled out within UCT. Both were taken care of, with the agreement being reached that the internal rollout would be handled by Professor Phakeng talking to the leadership of the FHS, that is, the Dean's Advisory Committee (DAC) and the heads of departments (HODs) and, ultimately, the UCT Communication and Marketing Department (CMD) which would handle the formal announcement. Professor Mayosi found a date for the meeting of the DAC and HODs, scheduled for Friday, 20 July, which the Vice-Chancellor and Associate Professor Lange would attend. Before going to the meeting venue, they met with Professor Mayosi and the dean's team to talk a little about what would follow. It was generally agreed that Professor Mayosi as dean would introduce the

visitors from Bremner, and after the Vice-Chancellor's presentation, he would say a few words.

At the meeting, Professor Phakeng outlined the three pillars of her vision, at the end of which she asked the meeting to "release Mayosi" to undertake this important work for UCT, the country, the continent and the world. A few questions of clarity were posed but, overall, in the view of Professor Phakeng, the meeting was supportive of her proposal. Professor Mayosi also spoke, expressing his support for the project and his keenness to start. In her address, the VC had asked that the people present should maintain the confidentiality around the plan until processes had been put in place to make a public announcement. The FHS leadership had been consulted as a first step but the idea was to put the project properly into the public domain at UCT.

At the VC's request, Professor Mayosi also found a date for the Faculty Board meeting at which the matter would be announced more widely. That meeting was set for 23 July. Because of the importance of this meeting in the story of Professor Mayosi's deanship, the panel here recounts the VC's version of events in some detail. Professor Phakeng said that when she left Bremner with Thando Tsotsobe, advisor in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, for the meeting, they were running quite late. It was around 16:20 and the meeting was due to start at the FHS at 16:30. She had already received a WhatsApp message from Professor Mayosi saying that they were waiting patiently. As they drove off, she received a call from Associate Professor Lange which said, in effect: "You cannot present Professor Mayosi as Pro VC at this meeting - the time is not right". Associate Professor Lange was reported to have said that the situation was "fragile".

Because of the rush, Professor Phakeng and Professor Mayosi did not meet to discuss anything prior to the meeting, as they had done in respect

of the previous meeting. She had to work on the basis that their previous understanding still held, which was that Professor Mayosi would develop the proposal which would accompany the NRF application, and that CMD was standing ready with a media release just as soon as everything was settled. As she put it to the panel: "... at a high level we [were] on the same page". Inside the lecture theatre, she presented her vision, including the proposal for a PVC appointment, but did not mention Professor Mayosi as the proposed incumbent. Afterwards, there was a fair amount of questioning from the floor, mostly about the process that would be followed to choose a pro vice-chancellor and an insistence that the process should be transparent and fair. Professor Phakeng left with Professor Mayosi and subsequently departed for her office in Bremner. There is no evidence that they spoke at any length, or at all, about what had just transpired.

Part of the early discussions with Professor Mayosi had been that he would be required to prepare a proposal for the NRF, which he had accepted. In continuing to put the paperwork together, the VC was expecting that eventually the proposal would be forthcoming from Professor Mayosi. As part of the preparations for the signing of the application to the NRF, she had also consulted the university's Transformation Committee. The Executive Committee (EXCO) of Council was scheduled to meet on the afternoon of 27 July and, according to the VC, everybody connected with the PVC proposal, including Professor Mayosi himself, was aware that the Chair of Council, Mr Siphon Pityana, was going to sign the documents at this meeting. She proceeded to the meeting room to find Mr Pityana already there, with the papers ready at his elbow. Fifteen minutes later they were informed that Professor Mayosi had died.

The Faculty Board meeting of 23 July looms large in the narrative of Bongani Mayosi's final days. That the last task on his computer was the NRF documentation that he had been asked to prepare has led many

to speculate about the link between the events at this meeting and his tragic act a mere four days later. The panel has made its position clear on such speculation: The panel does not construe its mandate as that of offering answers to the question why Professor Mayosi took the decision to end his own life.

In reconstructing the timeline of events, it is only possible to try to develop an understanding of what happened, and why. That the Vice-Chancellor did not go through with the announcement of Professor Mayosi as the person designated to head the project as pro vice-chancellor has been described, and has gained notoriety, as a “U-turn”. When questioned about the reasons, the VC maintained the position that she thought it wise to follow the advice of Associate Professor Lange, who was Professor Mayosi’s line manager and had been involved with the PVC project from early on. Just as she had asked both Associate Professor Lange and Dr Price, early on in the life of the idea, for advice on the process of making an appointment without advertisement, so did she now believe that Associate Professor Lange’s last-minute alert was not to be ignored.

According to Professor Phakeng, that advice was that there would be negative consequences if Professor Mayosi was announced as the PVC without the “footwork” having been completed. By this she understood that the timing was unfavourable; that the announcement would generate a procedural storm that would be counterproductive to the objective that was intended. She believed that there was possibly some support for this view from the sometimes pointed questioning at the Faculty Board meeting about how the PVC would be selected. It does not take a great leap of the imagination to guess that some of the questioners well knew that Professor Mayosi was the chosen candidate. The Vice-Chancellor might thus be correct in her apprehension of adverse comment or worse, had Professor Mayosi been announced at that meeting as the academic earmarked for the post.

But that would have been scant comfort to Professor Mayosi. He was under pressure to submit his application to the NRF, there were persistent reports that he was expected to assume the new post in a matter of days, and there is testimony that he was preoccupied with this issue, which finds some corroboration in the fact that it was the last item on his computer screen before he took his life. Given these circumstances, and the fact that there is no evidence that any of the behind-the-scenes detail was ever properly explained to him personally, the about-turn in announcing his appointment must have been devastating.

Indeed, it appears from testimony that Professor Mayosi's final days were a crucible of converging pressures. In addition to scheduled meetings and one-on-one performance assessment engagements that he was involved in, he was preparing for a trip abroad. On Friday, 27 July he was expecting a group of visiting colleagues from the United States, had an embassy appointment, in addition to the EXCO meeting he was scheduled to attend. The panel was told that the meeting of Monday, 23 July had come in the wake of another disappointment, linked to a national post in the medical research field which was soon to be vacant and in which Professor Mayosi had an interest. The panel heard that after some initially positive engagements, the conversation had suddenly "gone cold", amid unverified rumours that his tribulations within the faculty had somehow come to the attention of the prospective employer. It is open to speculation as to what might have been his state of mind when the PVC option also appeared to be wrenched from his grasp.

It is not possible to leave this discussion without referring to material made available to the panel. This was in the form of four pages of handwritten notes, from Professor Mayosi's notebook, from which he read when he was addressing the DAC and HODs meeting of 20 July 2018. The tone and content of the notes, as written, are consistent with evidence put before the panel about what Professor Mayosi said to the

meeting after the VC had spoken. They were written, in point form (seven points in two pages), in a way planned to guide a presentation that ranged from expressing thanks to colleagues, restating his hopes for the faculty, acknowledging having been deeply affected by the trauma of the student unrest, to announcing the decision taken to step down from the deanship and to return to an academic role, and ending with the expression of an intention to await a decision on the way forward from the Vice-Chancellor and Associate Professor Lange. (The panel is aware, from interactions with a number of interviewees, that some regard this speech by Professor Mayosi as another incident of “resignation”. The panel takes a different view, seeing Professor Mayosi’s announcement to his colleagues of a decision already taken as qualitatively different from the act of asking the employer to release him from his duties).

The panel takes comfort in mentioning the notes because of the panel’s confidence in the source of the document and the surrounding corroboration of its existence from colleagues who were at the meeting. Of interest is a continuation of the notes, on the third page, dated “23/7/18” and headed “Meeting with Mamokgethi Phakeng – Special Faculty Board.” On that page, amongst notes on research and leadership, the final entry is – “Discomfort zone: Centre of excellence in poverty-related health conditions”.

The panel finds value in these notes. An earlier enquiry by the panel had elicited the response that there were no minutes available in respect of this meeting. These pages provide a valuable insight into what has been the subject of a great deal of speculation.

The panel has not been immune from such speculation, having listened to the views and testimony of many interviewees on the subject of Professor Mayosi’s last days. These last days were characterised by a convergence of incidents, amongst which the promised redeployment

of Professor Mayosi to a senior research position looms large. This has exercised the collective mind of the panel considerably.

According to the evidence presented to the panel, it is possible to see Professor Phakeng's efforts as representing a genuine desire to help Professor Mayosi resolve his distress in the deanship in a dignified and sustainable way. It would appear that the consultations and the securing of buy-in from many stakeholders within and outside the university, had been a promising start, and should have provided a reasonable foundation for the acceptance of the plan to install Professor Mayosi in the PVC position. But it was not the only step needed, and when DVC Lange sounded the alarm, it must have been upon the realisation that it was not nearly enough.

The plan unravels badly when DVC Lange's advice persuades the Vice-Chancellor to pull back from naming Professor Mayosi as the earmarked incumbent for the new post. It is entirely possible that this prominent scholar was feeling under exceeding levels of pressure. Barely 24 hours before the Council Exco at which his research plan application was due to be signed off on, he was still expected to formulate his motivation for the job, whose availability may have seemed at that stage to be no longer a certainty. The panel can surmise that, being the perfectionist that he was, and experienced in the requirements of such applications, the need to do a good job would have been uppermost in Professor Mayosi's mind.





## CHAPTER 6

### UNIVERSITY HANDLING OF MAYOSI PASSING

This section primarily focuses on how the University of Cape Town handled the passing of Professor Mayosi, with the main focus being on the university's internal and external communication. The panel makes these observations on the basis of an analysis of media coverage, including opinion pieces, social media excerpts, radio and television interviews, video recordings of memorial services, official internal communications by the university Executive, and the testimony of interviewees who appeared before the panel. The following account highlights a sequence of communications and incidents in the aftermath of Professor Mayosi's passing. The main aim is to bring out the salient issues of communication and public discourse that ensued, as well as their overall impact on various university constituencies and on the image of the university.

The scale and volume of the mass media coverage of Professor Mayosi's suicide and its aftermath suggests that this is arguably the biggest story that has been associated with UCT in the past few years or since the dawn of the 21st century. Some of the reasons for this include the fact that Professor Mayosi was a person of great academic stature, nationally and globally, and that his tragic death brought up the issue of mental health challenges. He was not only presented as one of the best examples of black excellence but also as a prominent symbol of transformation at UCT. His cutting-edge research, leadership role in various health professional forums in the country and the continent as well as across

the world also added to the weight of this news.

His death came on the heels of protracted student-led protests which had rocked universities nationwide and manifested themselves on an unprecedented scale at UCT from 2015 to 2017. It is also important to note that digital communication, especially through social media, had become a big factor in mobilising students and in expressing their demands for transformation, free education and an end to the outsourcing of contract workers. It is this digital platform with active participation of ordinary citizens and students that tended to amplify stories on an unprecedented scale.

The aforementioned factors contributed to putting the spotlight on UCT with regard to its handling of this delicate matter. The reputation of the university was understandably at stake. The tragic incident also placed in sharp focus UCT's transformation project and, in particular, the experiences of black academics and staff members within the institution. It also focused attention on the impact of the student protests, and on mental health issues such as depression and suicide. Finally, the news of Professor Mayosi's passing was also a real test of UCT's crisis communication readiness when the institution was called upon to respond to the emotional outburst from all those who were shocked at this tragedy.

When the news of Professor Mayosi's death was relayed to the university it was immediately followed by university-wide communication informing its community of this loss. Most of these announcements were relayed via online mass communication and were well crafted to be sensitive

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<sup>11</sup> Prof. M. Phakeng, UCT Vice-Chancellor "*Passing of Professor Mayosi.*": UCT News, 28 July 2018

and inclusive of all the diverse constituencies of the university.

On the afternoon of Friday 27 July 2018, Vice-Chancellor Phakeng promptly and formally informed the university community of the passing of Professor Mayosi and indicated that the university was communicating with the family, who had promised further details. She also conveyed the family's desire for privacy as they were dealing with the loss. This message was posted on the university online platform to reach all internal university community members.

A day after his passing, the Vice-Chancellor issued a more detailed tribute to Professor Mayosi, highlighting his academic achievements as well as his broader contributions to the university and to society at large. She also conveyed condolences to his family, she extended her condolences to the students and his colleagues in the Faculty of Health Sciences and across UCT, and in the wider health sector, who knew and worked with him. She stated:

I share with you in the profound sense of loss his sudden death brings. ... Professor Mayosi's death has shocked us as a campus community. I know many colleagues and students will feel the effects of this loss over the time ahead. This is a very sad time for us at UCT and difficult as it is, we will mourn the loss and celebrate the life of Professor Bongani Mayosi with the dignity and integrity that he embodied.<sup>11</sup>

Up to this moment university communication had been well-managed and crafted, demonstrating sensitivity and inclusiveness which potentially drew all internal and external stakeholders of the university towards a common cause. This was followed by a statement from the family which disclosed the fact that Professor Mayosi had committed suicide after battling with depression for almost two years. The family also appealed to the public to allow them to mourn the loss. At this stage the news had

been relayed as a breaking headline story in almost all print, broadcast and online media with social media carrying the bulk of a deluge of tributes and expressions of grief.

A series of online communications encouraged members of the university community to join memorial services and provided information on venues and logistics. On Monday, 30 July 2018, the Vice-Chancellor issued another communication announcing the appointment of Dr Morar as acting dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences until the end of August 2018 or for a period of a month to ensure that there was business continuity and space to carefully consider transitional and succession arrangements. This communication also indicated that there had been consultations with faculty leadership prior to the decision on the acting dean.

All seems to have gone well in a series of formal internal online communications and media statements, until some interactive engagements with the media. The initial communications had been consistently released in measured tones, until probing questions had to be fielded after the family's statement was issued as the media, predictably, wanted to establish the causes of Professor Mayosi's depression and suicide. The Vice-Chancellor initially blamed the humiliating treatment of Professor Mayosi by some black student protestors who had called him "coconut" and a "sellout". She went further and implied that her predecessor and the senior leadership of the university had not done the right thing for not yielding to Professor Mayosi's resignation when he had offered to step down in November 2017. Upon reflection, the vice chancellor explained her dilemma and the complexities of the moment,

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<sup>12</sup> Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng *"Building Community after Trauma"*: University of Cape Town Online Newsletter, 31 July 2018.

which was emotionally charged to a high degree. With hindsight, she conceded that the university could have handled some of the issues differently.

After the family's statement, the VC also issued another statement focusing on psychoanalysis and the phenomenon of depression, encouraging people to disclose their condition and to seek counselling. It was this angle of the causal association between Mayosi's depression and his suicide that the media and the public had apparently been looking for. This set the tone for media headlines, a Twitter storm, reactions, counter-reactions, and retractions which dominated the headlines way beyond the memorial services and the funeral.

On 31 July 2018, the Vice-Chancellor issued a statement titled "Building community after trauma,"<sup>12</sup> which tried to clarify and provide context to her media pronouncements that suggested that she was blaming students for the death of Professor Mayosi. Instead of calming the situation, the statement further inflamed emotions as it seemed to reinforce media reports that she was blaming the student protests for Professor Mayosi's death. Excerpts from the VC's statement indicate that it did little, if anything, to dispel the notion that she was blaming student protestors for the tragic loss. Sections of the VC's statement bear witness to this assertion, where it is stated:

There have been some media reports and social media posts that give the impression that I blame the death of Professor Bongani Mayosi on the protests in the higher education sector over the past three years. This is not true... What I said was that the protests of 2016–2017 were not kind to any of us at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and they were not kind to Professor Mayosi as dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences. His office was occupied for about two weeks in 2016 ... And some black students were angry with him. They called him names, like

coconut or sellout, when his intentions were really for the students' best welfare ... The things that happened during the protests over the past few years were hard on everybody. Many of our staff and students have been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and we have sadly lost some to suicide. Recently it was Professor Mayosi, and I worry about who might be next. ... Differences of opinion are not wrong. But things were said and actions were taken that caused serious harm to people.

It was media interviews and this issued statement that unleashed a storm of accusations and counter-accusations, with members of the university community blaming each other for Professor Mayosi's death, and damaging the very dignity and privacy that the university and family had called for. Appeals for calm and restraint fell on deaf ears. Calm and even a modicum of mutual respect befitting this mourning period had evaporated. To her credit, the Vice-Chancellor tried on several occasions to clarify her comments and provide context but horses had bolted out of the stable and the social and mainstream media frenzy on who was to blame had generated a momentum of its own. There was a chain reaction from some leaders of student protests and opinion makers who wrote opinion pieces in various media platforms. A considerable number of these were a rebuttal of what they perceived as the university placing sole blame on the student protests. Some even went further to claim that this was an underhanded effort to delegitimize the 2015/2016 student protest movement and what is sought to achieve.

These two divergent and polarising positions presented by the VC and a student leader largely shaped the tone and texture of public discourse on the Mayosi matter and more broadly on UCT's dominant institutional culture and the experiences of black staff members within it. These polarised debates spilled over into discussions of the handling of Professor Mayosi's attempted resignations and the redeployment that

he was promised. Memorial services and the funeral service itself became a platform for diverse interpretations of what could have caused his depression, and how it had been handled by the university. Direct and indirect apportioning of blame became an inevitable part of speeches. It is notable that members of the Mayosi family also expressed their views on the student protests and the impact that they had had on the well-being of Professor Mayosi.

The unprecedented three-year student protests and political contestations within the university had left deep scars in the collective psyche of its various constituencies and they had not yet dealt with the healing and redemption process. The death of Professor Mayosi and more specifically how its communication was handled rekindled these difficulties as different stakeholders were trying to make sense of this loss. The apportioning of blame, particularly that which singled out students, was ill-conceived and had devastating consequences. This is by no means an exoneration of some student protestors whose disrespectful behaviour humiliated and demeaned staff members. It is also worth considering that the peak of student protests of the #OccupyFHS was almost two years before the tragedy, a period during which Professor Mayosi had endured many other difficult encounters, which were not directly related to the original protests. Failure to take these circumstances into account in the university's communications risked being seen as presenting only one stakeholder, the students, as a scapegoat.

Some of these consequences, as relayed to the panel by some of the interviewees, related to the mental health of the students themselves. Many staff members and student leaders who had worked closely with the students during the period of protest reported cases of students who attempted to commit suicide. Some are said to have carried the burden of guilt, made worse by the narrative on social and mainstream media, that placed the passing of Professor Mayosi at the door of the students.

Many of these students were admitted to hospital for treatment. Some students were even reluctant to attend memorial services, visit family or face university staff. It is reported that students approached retired Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane to facilitate meetings with the Mayosi family with the aim of resolving issues and reconciling, but this process does not seem to have taken place.

There is no record of a formal university programme to deal with the psychological trauma triggered by Professor Mayosi's death. What student counselling there was came mainly from staff members who had worked closely with the students during the protests. Most of the interviewees, a majority of whom were academic and administrative staff members who had worked with Professor Mayosi, indicated that they never received counselling assistance. In the absence of counselling programmes relating to the protests themselves, Professor Mayosi's passing and its aftermath simply exacerbated the problem.

Having reviewed the available material on the matter of the university's handling of Professor Mayosi's passing, the panel came to the conclusion that the response of the university was inept, although the panel acknowledged the complexity and intensity of emotions at the time. The instinctive attempt by the VC to apportion blame came across as an unfortunate attempt to psychoanalyse and establish causality for a complex phenomenon outside of the professional scope of clinical psychology and related fields. Predictably, it had negative ramifications and was bound to increase chatter and speculation, much of which was shared with the panel during the interviews. In fairness, it must be admitted that the Vice-Chancellor's numerous efforts to resolve the issue by explaining the context of her remarks needs to be acknowledged as a constructive effort to make amends. Her reflection on that incident and its communication has indicated her understanding of the situation and commitment to heal the university community.



Her critical introspection in pursuit of the aim of healing the university community was redemptive.

In the first place, the panel was told, laying the burden of blame on student protestors was either an attempt to simplify a complex issue, or a ruse to deflect attention from criticism of the university's own handling of Professor Mayosi's mental health issue, including the rumours of resignations refused. Secondly, some observers, especially among students and those who had expressed solidarity with the political agenda of the fallist movement, saw this as an effort to delegitimise the entire student-led struggles and the transformation agenda. Some even went so far as to suggest that this was a backlash against these struggles by people who never supported them in the first place. A third stream of thought viewed the essentialising of protestors into a monolith that does not differentiate the various strands and behavioural patterns of students as problematic. Ultimately, the panel heard, placing student protests as the primary cause of Professor Mayosi's depression and subsequent suicide could not account for the fact that when he was appointed dean these protests were already in full force, and that the intense period of upheaval that was represented by #OccupyFHS had taken place almost two years before he committed suicide. In that time there had been numerous encounters between Professor Mayosi and student leaders which indicated that he was still very much engaged with them, amid persistent reports that he had a special rapport with them.

Whatever view one takes of these attempts to unpack UCT's response, it is quite evident that the acrimonious exchanges unleashed by this response further polarised an already fragmented university community. It shone a spotlight on the lived experiences of black academics and staff members as well students in a university that had a mixed record of success in dealing with transformation.

These sad developments led the panel to reflect on the lessons learnt. These appear to be, firstly, that at a time of stress, instinctive and intemperate outbursts are to be avoided, and an effort must be made to discuss and plan a measured response. Such a response should take into account the need to maintain, as much as possible, the reputation of the institution and to avoid disruptions to the peaceful coexistence of the multiple stakeholders of the university. The apportioning of blame immediately upon receipt of the tragic news of Professor Mayosi's passing worked directly against this imperative.

Secondly, and directly linked to the first lesson, the need for a clear crisis communication strategy is evident. The deliberation and planning mentioned above would be aided immeasurably by the existence of a strategy that is geared towards facilitating the framing of a well-considered and pre-emptive communication that intuitively also takes into account the long-term effects of moments of strife or emotional upheaval. In the Professor Mayosi situation, an opportunity was missed to issue a well-considered, reassuring and inclusive statement, demonstrating maturity and foresight, which anticipates the unpredictability of the responses of diverse constituencies.

Thirdly, all this happened in the glare of the kind of publicity that has become the norm in these days of social media. On such occasions care should be taken to remember the dangers inherent in dealing with social and broadcast media, especially when participating in live interviews and interactive press conferences on sensitive issues.

Lastly, the Mayosi matter showed up the absence of counselling programmes that should be on hand to provide services for affected students and staff during such times of stress. In the view of the panel, such programmes of counselling and healing should be university-wide and should cover not just the aftermath of Professor Mayosi's death but

the mental health and emotional fallout of the two-year student protests. In the final analysis, the death of Professor Mayosi and the handling of communication thereafter seriously damaged the image of the university as this sharpened sustained focus on the university's challenges in dealing with transformation and stakeholder relations. It did not help matters that this happened on a mass scale in the digital media, and had a ripple effect that went beyond UCT and South Africa. This crisis also assisted in magnifying fault lines within the university community and provides a clear sense of the areas of intervention in building and healing the institution.



## CHAPTER 7

### INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK STAFF

Institutional or organisational culture is often cited in the mainstream literature as one of the most important factors in the outlook and performance of an organisation. Institutional culture could have a positive, productive and inclusive influence – or it may have the toxic, paternalistic and alienating effects of discrimination. In most instances, such a culture is pervasive and sub-consciously discharged, which makes it very difficult to identify and measure it, as it is woven into the very social, academic, style, orientation and existence of an institution.

Almost all studies and investigations into the experiences of blacks or into racial discrimination in organisations, and in particular universities, have cited marginalisation and alienation as a consequence of a dominant institutional culture, which often evolves into a hegemonic system that presents itself as a set of universal and inevitable values, norms and systems.<sup>13</sup>

In general terms and for the purpose of this report, institutional culture is taken as a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, norms and traditions that

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<sup>13</sup> J. Jansen(ed) *Decolonization in universities: The politics of knowledge*: 2019 ; J. Jansen *As by fire: The end of the South African university*: 2017. ; Ngcaweni, W (ed) *We are no longer at eas: The struggle for #FEESMUSTFALL*: 2018; Mabokela, R *Apartheid No More: Case studies of Southern African Universities in the process of transformation*: 2001; Soudien, C “The Transformation of South African Higher Education,” 2008.

shape the perceptions and practices of an institution or organisation, thus defining the manner of doing things in that organisation. These are often unspoken rules that shape habits, patterns of thinking, stereotypes, behaviours and styles of communication. Institutional culture is pervasive and impactful yet it is often intangible, subconscious and difficult to measure. It is either positive or negative to organisational strategic goals. Dominant institutional culture often assumes that it is based on conventional, logical and self-evident as well as universal norms and values that all others ought to understand and conform to. It is this culture that determines whether one is welcome to feel at home in an organisation or remains alienated and unwelcome. It is also this culture that is embedded in standards of what is accepted quality or excellence to be rewarded, and non-conformance that should be penalised. Although institutional culture is not formalised it has an overbearing influence on processes and decision-making in formal institutions.

South Africa in general, and public universities in particular, have been undergoing processes of restructuring and transformation to undo the legacy of the colonial and apartheid systems. Transformation efforts have had a mixed record of success in many universities. Dominant institutional cultures of established, previously white, universities are often identified as the source and manifestation of resistance to transformation, yet this is very difficult to measure. As Jonathan Jansen puts it, “[T]he last frontier in the quest for social integration and non-racial communities in former white institutions will always be this hard-to-define phenomenon called institutional culture.<sup>14</sup> Most universities, in their transformation efforts, have been grappling with this elusive and complex phenomenon as corrosive institutional culture becomes a point of resistance against any efforts to be inclusive.

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<sup>14</sup> (Jansen, 2004: 1).

The literature has identified a structural issue: The demographic profiles of students and senior management have drastically changed since the 1990s, whereas the profile of the academic staff who are at the core of the academic enterprise has hardly changed. Institutional culture is mostly manifested at this level of the academic project – teaching, learning, research and all associated processes that define the lived experience of staff and students in this area. It is also this level that has been successful in appropriating the language of change without actually changing. The academic core is the central point through which student experiences of success and failure are mediated, and it also represents the intellectual capital that influences university leadership’s policy position on academic matters that include performance assessment, promotions and allocation of resources for research and conferences. Academic staff are therefore well-positioned, as a fountain of legitimization, to embody the flavour and character of the university. Institutional autonomy and academic freedom are often invoked to protect and maintain the insularity of the dominant culture.

Important observations made during the interviews are quite instructive as they reveal a pattern that is consistent with what could be generally classified as dominant institutional cultural tendencies that have a negative impact on black academic leaders or staff members. In a number of instances white staff members are not immediately aware of the dominant institutional culture (to the extent that some even deny its existence) whereas black academics and staff members are acutely conscious of the manifestations of what they perceive to be alienating and often paternalistic institutional tendencies. It is worth noting that the interviews also demonstrated that white staff members are not a monolith, as they also demonstrated nuanced differences in their awareness and interpretation of UCT’s institutional culture. This was even more evident in the case of those who had recently joined the institution from other universities.

There are some cases which stand out prominently to illustrate this point. Some of these instances include the following areas:

- Performance assessment and executive coaching.
- Assumption of roles without responsibilities: Top-down imposition of decisions and interference in their implementation.
- Informal support networks and forums that are racially predetermined.
- Unstated expectations of black managers and academics in transformation tasks and management of unrest by black students and staff.
- Subtle and complex identity politics that are not openly acknowledged but are felt.

A consistent refrain in the testimony of senior black staff, including deans, who appeared before the panel, was the issue of performance assessments. Performance assessments of black deans or blacks in senior positions have generally been an issue because these staff members are reported as invariably achieving lower scores than their white counterparts. They are then offered the services of executive coaches who are sourced by the university. The role of executive coaches and their proximity to university authorities is often viewed with suspicion – they are either seen as patronising or as a manipulative exercise that, at face value, looks like a genuine intervention to build capacity, but is not. This kind of observation was consistently expressed by senior black staff, leading the panel to conclude that both the performance assessment system and the capacity building interventions attached to it suffer from a legitimacy crisis among black staff, which makes it difficult for these measures to yield the intended impact. At worst, these processes are seen as extensions of subtle control mechanisms which have pre-determined outcomes and lack integrity.

Professor Mayosi's own performance assessment as a dean and some expressed views on his performance as the head of the Department of Medicine are instructive. From evidence brought before the panel,

there is general consensus that he was outstanding in terms of academic and intellectual leadership and transformative scholarship. He was also credited with above-average capabilities in mobilising resources, recruiting and mentoring black academics, and enhancing the profile of the institution nationally, continentally and globally. Yet, officially, the system seemed comfortable to discount these positive leadership attributes to focus only on Professor Mayosi's administrative efficiency, especially during a time when his mental health had become an issue. The aforementioned leadership attributes are in line with the institution's strategic goals and ought to have been given greater weight.

Though direct evidence is scanty, there was a sense elicited from the interviews with senior black staff, especially those boasting national and international research prominence, that in many ways they were more revered abroad than at UCT, their home. One interviewee, citing his upcoming honorary award by a university in Europe, shared his bitterness at his pointed "invisibility" at his home institution.

There are prominent historical examples of eminent black scholars who are globally recognised for their outstanding work, who fell foul of the UCT system and subsequently suffered frustration and exclusion. These include Professor Archie Mafeje whose appointment as a senior lecturer in social anthropology in 1968 was rescinded following pressure from the apartheid government. Perhaps within the context of apartheid at the time this could be understood. More revealing is the account of his exclusion from the recruitment process in the 1990s when he had grown in his global stature and apartheid was being formally dismantled. Professor Mahmood Mamdani would suffer the same fate after being recruited as the head of African Studies when he tried to mainstream his programmes in an effort to transform the curriculum. These high-profile incidents are often cited as the most telling examples of something at the core of UCT which is resistant to change. A former dean who had a



long service record in leadership positions at UCT indicated to the panel the existence of an informal deans' forum and other informal support networks, such as where long-serving managers would pass on advice to newly appointed colleagues. This, he recounted, was certainly the case among the deans, where the social network provided the platform for helping the new arrivals to understand their tasks, thus compensating for the absence of formal induction. By his admission, black deans and senior academics have generally not taken advantage of this forum. The forum itself is voluntary and informal.

It can easily be seen as a social space and there is no formal invitation as such. It is quite possible that in such informal platforms, networks and friendships are reinforced and these later may have an impact on formal decision-making and governance processes. In the context of alienation and a trust deficit between groups, this reinforces dominant institutional culture and provides an avenue for resisting genuine transformation. Black academics also had their own network that often provided support to newly appointed members. They often describe this sense of solidarity as an effort to provide support and encouragement of minority blacks in a hostile and alienating leadership environment, in the hope that this would assist the transformation process. Such incongruent views reinforce the perception of the existence of an institutional culture which is viewed with suspicion by those who define themselves as outsiders.

It is worth noting that black scholars from other historically white South African universities expressed their surprise at how UCT's institutional culture of informal networks was so deeply entrenched. Many expressed frustrations with these subtle tendencies which were so embedded that they made it difficult to confront and resolve issues openly. Remarkably, this observation was also made by some white academics and executives who had worked in other historically white institutions outside the Western Cape Province.

The top-down imposition of austerity measures which led to restructuring and to significant cuts in faculty budgets is one of the instances where some former deans indicated some of the stresses they endured. They were expected to implement downsizing which was meant to trim down their operations by dismantling non-core programmes, and they spoke openly about the “politics” that erupted within their faculties and departments whenever choices had to be made as to what courses to cut. The split of opinion was reported as being visibly along racial lines when the proposal for a curriculum cut pitted a historically popular UCT offering against an innovation considered to be transformative by some staff. It should also be noted that this took place in the midst of political upheavals in the institution therefore adding more pressure. Interviewees testified that they detected a pattern of interference by senior leadership where they were told which programmes should not be affected by restructuring even if those were not core programmes. In the view of these colleagues, such interventions occurred when programmes of white academics were affected and hardly ever when programmes of interest to black academics were targeted.

Once black staff assume higher positions they are confronted with competing, and often contradictory, expectations from diverse constituencies that range from black students and staff members, to senior management and fellow managers or academics. This is intensified during institutional strife such as the protracted 2015–2016 student protests. In such instances the senior leadership of the university expect an executive manager or dean to defend the management position on issues and they, understandably, expect team spirit with little room for deviation once the university position has been stated. On the other hand, black staff and students often see fellow blacks in leadership positions as allies to help fight their battles and advance transformation. They sometimes expect black leaders to regularly inform them of what is happening at senior leadership level, and to share important insider

knowledge. Failure to do so is often experienced as creating social distance from the black constituencies and as betrayal of the cause. During student protests it became clear that fellow staff members, mainly white, expected black leaders and Professor Mayosi in particular to be a buffer between protesting students and faculty members. Anything short of that would then be seen as failing to protect colleagues or capitulating to student demands especially when a position at variance with student demands had been collectively taken. This presents a serious dilemma for black leaders as they may feel pulled in many directions, under pressure from irreconcilable expectations, and burdened with a sense that they are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

Interviews also revealed that blacks were not a monolithic group as they also have differences on how to relate to the institution and its dominant norms and conventions such as standards of excellence. Professor Mayosi is reported to have been a believer that with hard work blacks could excel and even transform UCT using its current standards, whereas others have always been sceptical of the dominant institutional arrangement, which they saw as a structural problem which was predetermined to prejudice blacks no matter what efforts they made.

Some of the interviewees indicated that identity politics was more complex as it went beyond simple black and white divisions into several categories, including white South Africans, whites who had come from Zimbabwe (former Rhodesians), black Africans (South African and non-South African), coloureds and Indians. One often-repeated example which illustrates this complex dynamic is the trumpeting in the media of Professor Mayosi as the first black dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences. Reportedly, this was not well received within sections of the coloured community who felt that the accolade properly belonged to Dr Marian Jacobs, who had occupied the deanship before Professor Mayosi.

There are anecdotal accounts of micro-aggression or resistance observed by administrative support staff who had served various deans and deputy deans. They reported a change of behaviour in how some academics, deputy deans, heads of departments as well as course convenors related to Professor Mayosi upon his assumption of the deanship. In one reported instance Professor Mayosi had instructed his personal assistant to arrange a meeting with a white colleague who, in a hostile tone, asked why he did not call personally. The assistant indicated her puzzlement at this reaction since she had never encountered it when she had acted upon similar instructions from previous deans.

The list of student grievances presented during the #OccupyFHS protest indicated that the institutional culture alienating black staff was also felt acutely by students as permeating their material conditions and learning environment.

The panel wishes to conclude this section with some thoughts about the culture in South African universities that were historically white and English speaking, dubbed in popular parlance, liberal universities. In the panel's observation from the literature on institutional culture and various testimonies of informants, these universities are sometimes trapped in their self-understanding of their liberal credentials, such as the cachet of having opposed apartheid. Sometimes this self-image is buttressed by a perceived link to neoliberal ideology as the key driver of globalization in the last three decades, since the fall of the Berlin wall. The notion that these universities are beyond reproach in respect of apartheid guilt and are part of the dominant mainstream ideology on a global scale often sub-consciously positions them as a benchmark towards which universal norms and best-practice should be drifting. This universalistic pretention undermines any serious effort to transform power relations which alienate a considerable number of black academics especially those who assume positions of leadership. In the case of UCT the fact

that the University is ranked highly in terms of its research output and academic quality may also reinforce the thinking that “if it is not broken why fix it?” In such circumstances, any person alienated by the exclusionary institutional culture is simply labelled as not living up to the high academic and professional standards of the institution without any due consideration of the possibilities of epistemic injustice that emanates from stifling of plurality of paradigms. This also reinforces an often unjustified notion that scholarship that mainly focuses on, and is informed by, Africa’s context is necessarily not globally competitive or lowers the standards and rigour of the academic enterprise. In such circumstances, the person who controls the master narrative of what is authentic and quality knowledge will always be in a position to determine what standards are applied to assess quality or lack of it.



## CHAPTER 8

### KEY FINDINGS OF THE PANEL

#### 1. University Handling of the Promise of Redeployment

The evidence from the interviews shows that the well-intentioned promise by the UCT Executive of the redeployment of Professor Mayosi to the position of Pro Vice-Chancellor heading a Centre of Excellence became a stressful experience for Professor Mayosi when it was not pursued with consistency and when, in a public about-turn, the offer was not proceeded with. The reasons that led the Vice-Chancellor to “tone down” the expected public announcement of Professor Mayosi as the proposed incumbent of the new post were, in all probability, plausible and sound, especially the belated realisation of the bureaucratic and legal complications that might ensue if some steps were missed on the way to the announcement. But that would have been scant comfort to a person who, the evidence suggests, was in a state of uncertainty and anxiety at this time. He was under pressure to submit his application to the NRF, there were persistent reports that he was expected to assume the new post in a matter of days, and there is testimony that he was preoccupied with this issue, which finds some corroboration in the fact that it was the last item on his computer screen the night before he took his life. Given these circumstances, and the fact that there is no evidence that this was ever properly explained to him personally, the about-turn in announcing his appointment must have been devastating.

## **2. Attempted Resignation(s) and the Promise of Redeployment.**

These two are linked because the very same pressures that led to Professor Mayosi's resignation from the deanship would possibly have been alleviated if the offered redeployment to a senior research post had succeeded. On resignation, the panel was aware of the sensitivity of the matter because of the underlying criticism of the university executive if, indeed, they had rebuffed Professor Mayosi's attempts to relinquish his post. The panel found one clearly proved resignation, an email of 3 November 2017, but grappled with a number of other claims. Evidence presented to the panel was that the proven resignation had not been refused, but rather that Professor Mayosi was persuaded to withdraw it, after mechanisms to ease his burden were promised. Other possible resignations are matters of reported conversations with Professor Mayosi by some colleagues, some of which the panel found to be credible. There is no formal documentation attesting to these.

## **3. University handling of the news of Professor Mayosi's passing**

The university's response to Professor Mayosi's passing was, on the whole, poor, fragmented and, on occasion, ill-considered. The public statements that were made and widely reported in the media, especially the accusation that the tragedy was directly attributable to the student protests, are regrettable and overly simplistic, as the matter was much more complex. These statements divided the university community and led to heightened levels of anxiety among students and staff, at a time when they should have had the opportunity to mourn together as a community. This compounded an already problematic set of divisions on campus and in the wider UCT community and beyond, resulting from the earlier protests. It also went against the spirit of the plea by the Mayosi family, that they be allowed to mourn in peace. A prominent university that had gone through the widely publicised and fierce student protests since 2015 ought to have refined its policies and strategies of crisis communication.

#### **4. The Nature of the 2015–2017 Student Protests and their Individual and Collective Impact**

The intensity and sometimes confrontational nature of the student protests was unprecedented at UCT, hence the deeply traumatising and polarising impact that they had on staff and students. The student protests were also a source of rupture, causing divisions among staff members and management as well as within the student body. Two narratives emerged from the interviews. One was that Professor Mayosi maintained on the whole a good relationship with students in his faculty despite the difficulties and acrimony of #OccupyFHS. On the other hand, there is evidence that on occasion the students showed an incredible amount of disrespect, both in face-to-face encounters and in numerous electronic communications with him. People interviewed described how deeply this distressed him. Importantly, the protests and the personal and collective upheaval that they wrought so pervaded Professor Mayosi's tenure as dean that it is impossible to judge his performance in the post except in the context of this abnormal instability.

#### **5. Concerns about Mental Health, its Detection and Support for the Afflicted**

That Professor Mayosi could go through a period of mental unwellness, and be known by many people to be so afflicted, without the matter formally reaching the executive leadership is problematic. It is especially concerning that it was not detected in a faculty of specialists in the health sciences. While there is enough information that he was adept at putting up a brave front, there is also abundant evidence that, at some point, his unwellness was evident and openly discussed, which makes the failure to take decisive action all the more concerning. Whether this was a failure of detection by the university's systems (such as they may exist) or of purposive reporting by those who had the information, it represents an indictment of UCT's systems for ensuring the health and well-being of its staff and students.



### **6. Succession Planning and Support for Leadership Roles.**

The panel was told several times that at UCT the transition of staff from academic functions to executive management roles is not preceded by a formal induction process. It was reported that no induction programme existed when Professor Mayosi took up his position as dean. The fact that he was plunged into a new role with little institutional support at the same time as the outbreak of the student protests is an important factor in assessing his performance in the role. It was also emphasised that this “sink-or-swim” approach has sometimes been explained as being based on the belief that university insiders do not need induction, as in the case when a staff member moves from one department to another. This short-sighted belief needs to be reviewed, given the many personal and professional variables at play in any such transition. These failings are compounded, in the case of black leaders, by perceptions and suspicions that they were set up to fail.

### **7. Inadequate Infrastructural Support for a Large and Complex Faculty**

The Faculty of Health Sciences is by far the greatest contributor to the university’s research output and research fundraising. It also has multiple critical external stakeholders, such as the national and provincial departments of health, the academic hospital, various professional bodies of the health and medical sciences, and the health sector industry, which includes pharmaceutical companies and a range of regulatory bodies. The current institutional arrangements and resourcing of this faculty, including support for the deanship, are inadequate: Unlike other faculties, the FHS has to shoulder greater responsibilities in the context of a more complex matrix of stakeholders. By the time of Professor Mayosi’s assumption of the deanship there had generally been a high turnover of deans in the faculty, each with their own style of management. The high turnover may have caused inconsistencies in leadership styles which could have accentuated the inadequacies of the institutional structures.

### **8. The Needs of Individual Black Staff Members Versus Institutional Demographic Imperatives**

Professor Mayosi's reported and increasingly urgent desire to shed his deanship duties, and his attempts to resign, which were all to no avail, seem to point to a phenomenon that appears quite prominently in the literature on diversity and demographic representation, even though it may not have been visible in university debates. This refers to the situation where the institutional need to maintain an impressive demographic profile for purposes of compliance reporting often leads to the temptation to retain incumbents from designated groups in high-profile, high-pressure posts even when this is at variance with the actual needs or aspirations of the individual staff member. This may happen even in institutions where the ideal of diversity is genuinely embraced, if there is no conscious will to show sensitivity to individual needs and feelings as well. While the evidence is scanty, this may explain in part Professor Mayosi's failure to extricate himself from the deanship over many reported attempts.

### **9. Gaps in Professor Mayosi's Social Support System at the Moment of Need**

From the interviews it became apparent that Professor Mayosi's rapidly rising national and global stature as a leading transformative academic and researcher brought about a social distance that was not of his own making, as is often the case in such developments. Supporters and ordinary observers alike appeared to be either in awe of his stature or blinded by their perceptions of his apparent invincibility or infallibility. They thus either did not see that he was struggling or were at a loss as to how to step in to halt the decline, leaving him vulnerable and exposed when he needed their input and intervention most, as he dealt with his mental health issues in the context of heightened student protests and unfortunate administrative lapses, as well as pressures from his own

colleagues. It appeared as if familiar and traditional communication lines had dimmed in inverse proportion to his rising star.

### **10. Black Leaders Subjected to Multiple Expectations**

Many senior black staff interviewed described how their positions exposed them to being seen as champions of transformation by the black constituency, and perceived as a threat to the status quo by some white colleagues. There is often little understanding of this dilemma faced by black leaders at UCT. Especially potent in this mix is the potential for backlash from either side, especially if the leader concerned is perceived as being sympathetic to the other. Hovering above all this is the Executive with its own demands on the dean, expecting him or her to be a team player. These may sound like generalisations but the panel is satisfied from information received that the experience of black leadership conforms to some version of this picture, and is usually more acute in times of stress.

### **11. Competing Influence of Formal and Informal Interactions and Decision-making**

One of the most pervasive features of UCT's institutional culture seems to be the existence of informal networks which interact and often influence decision-making processes, operating parallel to formal structures, and sometimes actually feeding into them and even overriding them. Generally referred to as "corridor talk", this well-known UCT phenomenon is reported as one of the factors that have made it difficult for leaders, particularly black leaders, to discharge their responsibilities effectively. By their very nature, institutional culture manifestations of this kind are very difficult to detect but their impact is unmistakable. A considerable number of black leaders have pointed this out as one subtle form of the resistance to transformation at UCT, which sometimes overrides formal authority and expressed policy.

## **12. Appointing High-profile Researchers to Executive Management Posts**

In the appointment of academics to management roles there has been no evidence to date that careful consideration has been given to the inevitable tensions that set in when a high research profile and its commitments meet the wear and tear of administrative duty. The panel was repeatedly told that this had never worked well in practice, and that it was time to rethink the instinctive assumption that a dean of FHS needs to be an academic high-flyer who can hold his or her own against the best researchers in the world.

## **13. Deans' Discretion Versus Central Steering**

Interviews, especially with senior staff and former deans, revealed an area of tension not often discussed. There is an apparent disjuncture between the frequently expressed concept of devolution at UCT, where deans are believed to enjoy significant levels of discretion and managerial autonomy, and the top-down decisions in practice from the executive which sometimes impact heavily on the ability of deans to manage their faculties. In the present crisis, this disjuncture surfaced in decisions from the centre relating to finances (the austerity drive), staffing appointments, and the deployment of security forces, which restricted a dean's choices in dealing with demands. Professor Mayosi as dean was not immune to these pressures. He faced student demands and a chorus of disapproval from colleagues critical of his leadership with a depleted arsenal of what he could use as leverage (e.g. budget) to manage the situation.

## **14. The Fluidity of the Concept of Competence and the Contestations Around It**

Observations about Professor Mayosi's performance and impact are also

contested terrain with some academics, especially black colleagues, praising his transformative and visionary leadership as demonstrated during his tenure as the head of the Department of Medicine, the largest in the faculty. But others find fault with his leadership style, perceived lack of decisiveness and avoidance of direct conflict. It is interesting to note how fluid and often contradictory these accounts are, especially when considering how those who claim he was incompetent as a leader tend to position other leadership attributes such as driving genuine transformation, raising significant research funding, identification and nurturing of talent, as being outside the definition of leadership. They also blame him for administrative failures such as the admissions debacle, which was an administrative error outside his control, without giving him credit for his energetic interventions to resolve this once it had occurred.

### **15. Difficulty in Pinning Down Perceptions about Support for Professor Mayosi from his Colleagues**

The pronounced lack of consensus among the panel's interviewees on the question of whether or not Professor Mayosi, as dean, had the support of his colleagues in the faculty points to the existence of a worrying tendency at the FHS (and in UCT in general) for people to split along racial lines over how they see or interpret the same set of facts. On the question of support from his close working colleagues in the deanery and the Dean's Advisory Committee in particular, the panel was subjected to divergent views, with some swearing that the support and assistance of these structures was steadfast, while others maintained that there was no comfort for Professor Mayosi within these bodies, especially when they differed on issues.

### **16. Weak Crisis Preparedness in Respect of Hazardous Materials**

In addition to defects in crisis management communication, the student

protests also revealed poor overall crisis readiness at UCT in respect of laboratories and other repositories of hazardous or sensitive materials. It appears to have been due more to luck than to planning that the skirmish outside the Institute of Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine (IDM) with students who wanted to break into the laboratories did not end in a catastrophe which could have had devastating implications for not only the university community, but for wider Cape Town.

### **17. The Hand of Staff in the Student Protests**

The panel heard a lot of testimony pointing to the participation of some staff in the student protests, which went beyond solidarity and ideological support. There are accounts which point to occasions where some of the more disruptive actions of the protesters were instigated by staff members. The panel thought that these testimonies were important enough to record, but also that caution must be exercised to avoid essentialising all staff, or even all staff who were sympathetic to the student cause, as disrupters. For one thing, by most accounts, the numbers of staff involved in any activity that might be characterised as instigation were really small.

### **18. The Distinctive and Complex Identity of Cape Town and the Western Cape**

The Western Cape, and Cape Town in particular, has a unique demographic outlook compared with the other provinces of South Africa and this has implications for group dynamics and race relations within the university. It is with this in mind that issues of identity politics and racial tension are to be understood. Though hard evidence of the impact of this is difficult to come by, it was notable that this came out as a commonly shared view among interviewees who had worked or studied in other parts of the country before joining UCT.



## CHAPTER 9

### RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL

After carefully considering the salient points of the panel findings and in the various reports on UCT's institutional culture and race dynamics, the panel recognises the many efforts of successive leaders and appointed teams to deal with some of the identified issues. It also acknowledges wide-ranging transformation programmes instituted over the years, as well as the globally recognised stature and academic standing of this university. Indications are that even the best of the previous efforts have not had the intended effect of introducing comprehensive and irreversible transformation. This point is amplified by the inquiry into the tragic death of Professor Mayosi and into the student protests generally. The fault lines within the institution are, unsurprisingly, magnified during these periods of stress.

It is the intention of this report to present specific recommendations that can assist in dealing with the issues arising from a review of Professor Mayosi's tenure as dean, and the lived experiences of black staff members, students and diverse stakeholders at UCT. If these recommendations are embraced and implemented they will go a long way towards addressing some of the challenges of institutional culture that have alienated many dedicated staff members and students. Hopefully, they will also advance the transformation agenda and consolidate UCT's proven record as a globally-recognised African university. Some of the recommendations

are informed by Professor Mayosi's encounters whereas others are extracted from the reported experiences of many black staff members and students. Most of the recommendations apply generally to the university while some are specific to the Faculty of Health Sciences, which occupies a very important position within UCT's research and academic life, as well as in the health sector of the Western Cape and the country.

### **1. Compulsory Immersion Programme in Diversity Sensitivity**

Given the recurring concerns about identity issues centring on race, gender, age group, religion, social class and nationality, it has become imperative to subject staff, particularly those in leadership positions, to a deep, and compulsory, immersion programme of diversity sensitivity training. This must be more than the usual basic one- or two-day workshop that institutions often conduct. Such a programme should assist staff members to unlearn often subconscious identity-based prejudices and relearn new skills while embracing a new worldview on issues of diversity. The programme should be designed and driven by a credible institution or individual, with a proven track record of conducting transformative programmes of this nature which have demonstrated sustainable impact.

### **2. Institutional Arrangements and Support for the Faculty of Health Sciences and its Leadership**

There is a need to review the institutional architecture of the Faculty of Health Sciences to provide proper support that is responsive to the faculty's unique position. This position reflects the size of the research portfolio and the amount of funds raised, the complexity of managing the interests of multiple internal and external stakeholders, including the direct interface with the provincial and national health departments and medical agencies as well as suppliers of medical materials and facilities.



Such an arrangement should particularly focus on support for the dean, the deanery, the departments and specialised divisions, institutes and centres.

### **3. Balancing the often Competing Requirements of Management Roles and Academic Research Needs**

As the findings of the panel have indicated, the demands of leadership often compete with, and at times undermine, any passion for the pursuit of academic research, especially when the person appointed is at the crest of his or her career, or at a critical point in their career trajectory. Even leading researchers may have several multi-year research commitments in the studies that they lead, thus creating dual and often competing responsibilities once they assume positions of management. An actual assessment of existing and prospective research programmes involving a prospective manager must be undertaken to assess the load and provide advice or assistance on a meaningful transition.

### **4. Memorialisation and Preservation of Professor Mayosi's Legacy**

As part of dealing with the tragedy in a positive, creative and sustainable manner, there is a need to memorialise Professor Bongani Mayosi in a manner befitting his stature, his contribution to the university as well as his transformative scholarship and excellence. Such memorialisation could include scholarships, memorial lectures or renaming of new or old buildings after him. In this manner Professor Mayosi's tragic death, which became a symbol of pain and division, could be transformed into a positive memorial to black academic excellence and sustainable transformation. Such a symbolic recognition will also assist UCTs own journey of transformation and reconciliation.

### **5. Succession Planning as a Vehicle for Embedding Transformative Support Structures**

UCT, like any self-respecting organisation, has had succession planning policies for many years, operating in units, budget centres and departments across the university, with varying degrees of success. What is proposed here is that UCT must take the opportunity offered by the events that led to this report to ensure that policies and mechanisms are put in place to ensure an effective succession planning regime that goes beyond bureaucratic compliance with labour legislation and selection guidelines, but encompasses creative identification, preparation and mentoring mechanisms. UCT needs a creative system that picks up on potential and nurtures it up the ladder, with built-in training, mentorship and other empowerment resources, culminating in structured induction and 360-degree support to the new incumbent of a senior post, including the availability of effective “panic button” mechanisms in times of need. Staff identified as having leadership potential should be exposed to leadership opportunities such as regular acting appointments during the absence of senior colleagues as part of their empowerment and, once appointed, should enjoy access to clearly defined avenues for troubleshooting support.

### **6. A University-wide Programme of Healing and Atonement as a Post-trauma Response**

The #FeesMustFall student protests that swept across South African public universities from October 2015 were unprecedented in scale and intensity and were particularly traumatic for institutions such as UCT which had not experienced such upheaval in a long while. These experiences had ramifications of psychological trauma that impacted profoundly on students, staff and management. The tragic death of Professor Mayosi further deepened this trauma and the handling of both the protests and the death of Professor Mayosi left deep psychological

scars and divisions which remain unresolved. It is for this reason that we recommend a university-wide programme of healing, atonement and redemptive reconciliation which will also develop rules of engagement in resolving similar challenges should they arise in future. As many of the people interviewed by the panel indicated, the psychological debt of scars left by these deeply traumatic experiences cannot be left unattended.

### **7. Effective Crisis Management and Crisis Communication Strategy**

Communication and management of the passing of Professor Mayosi was impulsive, reactive, defensive and uncoordinated. In the age of mass digital communication this seriously dented the image of the institution and further polarised its various constituencies, depriving them of the opportunity to mourn collectively. Similarly, the communication and handling of various incidents of student protest caught the university off guard as protestors seem to have had the upper hand in setting the agenda of public discourse, with the university authorities reacting.

There is a need to develop an effective and coordinated crisis management and crisis communication system, with a clear indication of the instances where the chairperson of Council, the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Registrar and/or the university spokesperson must speak, as well as a consistent message that they convey to the public. This should include developing common talking points and holding statements that anticipate the occurrence of certain incidents.

A crisis management leadership team should be in place in the event of a crisis in order to coordinate responses and ensure operational continuity.

### **8. Early Detection and Decisive Intervention in Cases of Mental Health Distress**

With the help of hindsight, it is now common knowledge that many senior leaders of the university and Professor Mayosi's colleagues were aware of his mental health challenges (whether characterised as depression or burnout) but seemed unable to take decisive steps to intervene and in some instances simply added more responsibilities, thus further compounding the problem. For an institution of this international standing, which also hosts one of the leading research and academic hospitals on the continent, UCT ought to develop very clear guidelines for early detection and swift intervention when its staff members or students have health challenges.

### **9. Balancing Staff Well-being and Demographic Imperatives**

UCT must devise ways to promote a culture in which the management of senior leaders, especially those from designated groups, is characterised by sensitivity to the balance that must to be struck between the individual needs and aspirations of these staff members, and the demographic imperatives of the institution's transformation programmes. In the panel findings there were disturbing suggestions that Professor Mayosi made more than the one recorded tilt at resigning, but to no avail. The suggestion that on some of these occasions the arguments used to discourage him were those of institutional stability are particularly worrying.

### **10. Hostile Engagements and New Ways of Managing Conflict**

The 2015/2016 university student protests in South Africa were unprecedented in their scale and intensity. They were both national in their form and institutional in their manifestation. This must be borne in mind in any assessment of how stakeholders expressed themselves and how institutions managed the protests and demands.

Information from interviews revealed to the panel that the genuine concerns of student protestors are often blemished by the violent and intemperate nature of confrontation, that is often led by a few individuals. Such confrontation, which often goes beyond the rules of decent democratic engagement, leads to humiliation and suppresses many voices that then retreat into silence out of fear of reprisals. In a knowledge institution open expression ought to be an intrinsic element of the political culture, or the possibility exists that a tyranny of those who can exert more violence or pressure may prevail, thus suffocating democratic discursive spaces. The University and all its different stakeholders should come together with the aim of developing rules for democratic engagement, which should be enshrined in a compact. This will go a long way towards ensuring that the political culture of intimidation and humiliation does not take root, while at the same time guaranteeing the democratic right to express grievances or alternative views.

There is a general consensus even though from different standpoints that the protests would not have been as prolonged, nor as vicious at times, had the university's initial response been more measured and less reactionary. UCT leadership must develop as a matter of urgency the ability to adopt a proactive, open and non-defensive approach to engagements with students and staff which involve discontent and potential conflict. Not only must mechanisms be put in place for early detection of signs of discontent, but the university on these occasions must strive to seek out and focus on the causes and substance of the discontent rather than on the manner of its expression. An engaging and responsive institutional culture is of vital importance in pre-empting, and effectively dealing, with future challenges.



## APPENDIX

1. Letter of appointment of panel
2. Panel's Term of Reference
3. Submission to Council by Concerned Staff and the UCT Black Academic Caucus entitled Recommendation: Terms of Reference  
*(IF this is not A confidential document)*
4. FHS students' list of 34 Demands
5. Professor Mayosi's memo to the Faculty on the mini-semester
6. At least two of the VC's communications on the passing of Professor Mayosi:
  - The first formal announcements
  - the VC Desk entitled "Building Community after Trauma"



**Office of the Registrar**  
**I-Ofisi ye-Registrar**  
**Kantoor van die Registrateur**

**Royston Pillay: Registrar**

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Professor Thandabantu Nhlapo  
C/O University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch  
Cape Town

By Email: [Thandabantu.nhlapo@uct.ac.za](mailto:Thandabantu.nhlapo@uct.ac.za)

23 January 2019

Dear Professor Nhlapo

This is to confirm the resolution of the Council of the University of Cape Town to establish a panel of external members to review those issues raised by stakeholder representatives in the immediate aftermath of the passing of Professor Bongani Mayosi, and to invite you to be a member and chairperson of this panel. Thank you for accepting Council's invitation and for your attendance at a preliminary meeting of the panel on 18 December 2018. The panel will next meet on 29 January 2018.

I confirm the panel's terms of reference as set by Council.

The panel will undertake its review in two stages. The first stage will be confidential to the Mayosi and Khumalo family. The second stage will not be confidential.

#### Stage 1

- 1.3 The panel will establish a factual record and timeline of events from the point at which Professor Mayosi was appointed Dean to the time of his passing.
- 1.4 In establishing the aforementioned record and timeline, the panel's review will include (a) Professor Mayosi's induction as Dean, (b) support provided to him, (c) his reported subsequent resignation as Dean and the reported non-acceptance thereof, and (d) the reported proposal to appoint him as a scholar to lead a Centre of Excellence at UCT.

#### Stage 2

- 2.1 The panel will review the systems for the management of senior leaders, induction processes and institutional support for those in leadership positions, with a particular focus on black leaders at the University, and associated institutional culture factors.

- 2.2 The panel's review will seek to identify those factors that provide opportunities to inform institutional interventions to assist the University in the future.

Recognising the time demands that this process will require, I wish to again thank you sincerely for agreeing to assist the University in this important matter.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Pillay', written in a cursive style.

Royston Pillay  
Registrar and Secretary to Council



## Statement on the Handling of Prof. Mayosi's Passing and a Call for an Inquiry

Concerned Academics and the UCT Black Academic Caucus

31 July 2018

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We, the black academics of the University of Cape Town (UCT) are deeply concerned with the manner in which the circumstances that precipitated Prof. Mayosi's tragic fate on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July have been handled following the announcement by the family on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July that he "took his own life." In their statement, the Mayosi family had clearly indicated that they were "struggling to come to terms with this devastating loss" and specifically asked that we should "understand our need for privacy during this difficult time". We thus strongly feel that the mudslinging we have been witnessing over the last few days is premature and not in keeping with the expressed wishes of the Mayosi family. This period up to the burial of Prof Mayosi on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August should be devoted to mourning and celebrating his life.

Our proposal is that the UCT Council should, as soon as possible after the funeral, set up an inquiry that will make a thorough investigation of the circumstances leading to Prof Mayosi's decision to terminate his life. We further propose that this inquiry must be set up in consultation with especially black academics and students, who have on various occasions expressed their experiences of being marginalized at UCT. It is our view that an understanding of the working conditions in institutions such as UCT is key to such an inquiry. It is hard for us to exclude the UCT working environment from the tragic death of our colleague, Prof Mayosi and indeed others, including students.

We again propose that the entire process should be transparent and all records and archives pertinent to this investigation should be made available. This applies specifically to all the correspondence and reports from the period students are alleged to have occupied Prof Mayosi's office in 2016 to the day he passed away on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 2018.

Finally, it is our firm view that the results of this inquiry will not only help us understand the circumstances leading to the passing away of Prof Mayosi. Its results will make a huge contribution to identifying in fairly precise terms what it is that is wrong with the UCT

structures and how these could be addressed to the benefit of especially the historically and currently marginalized groups, predominantly blacks.

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES**

**RESPONSE TO STUDENTS' DEMANDS: A PROPOSAL FOR ENGAGEMENT**

The Faculty of Health Sciences received the list of student demands and noted, with concern, the serious underlying student experiences which have contributed to student frustration and pain, inequitable learning opportunities, and lack of security of person and assessment processes. We deeply regret that these matters persist and commit ourselves, as a Faculty, to sustained engagement to redress the deep underlying issues and to create an environment that offers each of our talented, remarkable students the opportunity to grow, flourish, have a university experience that is positive and become the audiologist, doctor, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, or speech language pathologist that she/ he dreams about.

This document reflects joint responses to Health and Rehabilitation Sciences and Medical students - where there are differences, these have been reflected. The responses contained in this document are an initial proposal for action and we, as the Faculty, welcome further discussion and feedback so that the plans can be further refined. We wish to assure you that there will be monitoring of our progress on each of the matters raised.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **STUDENT HEALTH**

Demand 1:

The Faculty of Health Sciences should pay for the Hepatitis B vaccinations for first year students on financial aid.

Demand 2:

A clinic for Health Science students is to be set up on campus offering basic healthcare services such as HIV testing with an adequate number of resident psychologists.

Demand 3:

Psychologists in the clinic should be more representative of the student body.

Demand 4:

There should be clarity and consistency about the procedure for students on ARV Post-Exposure Prophylaxis as some blocks require the student to still attend classes and activities and others do not. The same should be done for students on TB treatment.

### **STUDENT AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT**

Demand 5:

For clinical students to fully exercise their right to protest without victimisation. We as clinical students of all Health Sciences disciplines therefore demand our right to protest and to protection.

Demand 6:

Sensitisation education of Faculty staff and lecturers on issues including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, transphobia, class and ability (ableism).

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Demand 7:

All lectures are to be recorded and publicised to students.

Demand 8:

Lecture slides should be posted on VULA prior to the commencement of lectures to allow students time to prepare for the lecture.

An emphasis is placed on the BHP and BP lecture slides and LOs being released before lectures and tutorials.

Demand 9:

Lecturers who miss scheduled lectures should be held accountable and should face repercussions from the Faculty.

Demand 10:

Clinical exposure should be an integral part of the curriculum from first year.

Demand 11:

A tutoring system is to be in place for all years of study and management should provide some form of incentive for student tutors.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Demand 12:

Mandatory recording of oral examinations and a thorough breakdown of how the examiner arrived at that particular mark.

Demand 13:

Students should have access to OSCE mark sheets.

Demand 14:

Examination scripts are to be handed back to students for review at no additional charge, in the interest of transparency.

Demand 15:

OSCE follow up questions should be standardised and clear guidelines should be given on how markers are to arrive at a final mark. This is to ensure that students cannot be marked down as a result of their appearance or accent. That steps be put in place to obviate perceived and real possibility that student appearance may lead to bias in teaching and examinations.

Demand 16:

To reveal what the role of the Examination Board is, who sits on the Board, the guidelines followed, and what regulatory mechanisms are in place to ensure the best interest of students.

Demand 17:

Students demand that only failed courses should be repeated and not the entire year.

Demand 18:

Time for adequate studying is to be made available between the final exams and the supplementary exams for failed blocks in clinical years.

Demand 19:

Flag system to be transparent and students should be informed if they are flagged.

Demand 20:

FHS timetables should be received timeously, allowing students enough time to prepare. Timetables should be published at least a month before examinations begin.

## **TRANSPORT AND SAFETY**

Demand 21:

A call for a transport review with students, Dean team, drivers and the Operations Department.

Demand 22:

Transport is to be made available for all clinical block activities that students are expected to attend. Safety is a concern for students and they feel safer in university organised transport.

Demand 23

Transport booking must close on Friday of the preceding week and not Wednesday. The booking system needs to be evaluated as students have issues with the current system.

Demand 24

We refuse to partake in academic activities at sites that cannot guarantee our safety – students should be given the right to request additional security if they feel unsafe.

Demand 25:

Bus drivers demand a pay increase similar to the increase received by Jammie drivers, post insourcing. These drivers drive in dangerous areas late at night and also feel that their safety is at times compromised when fetching students from various sites.

## **FINANCE AND FEES**

Demand 26:

To remove the monthly compounding of interest on outstanding fees after June.

Demand 27:

To dismantle the minimal initial payment (MIP) by February and extend our period for payment to the end of the academic year.

Demand 28:

Students on grace period are to be housed at medical residences. Students cannot fulfil their academic responsibilities without their right to adequate housing as stipulated in Chapter 2 of the Constitution of South Africa.

Demand 29:

Student cards of students on grace period are not to be deactivated.

Demand 30:

The Health Science faculty is to increase funding to assist all students who are unable to pay their tuition fees. The faculty should put pressure on private companies, particularly private hospital groups for funding.

Demand 31:

Transcripts should be made available to students with outstanding fees as these students will need these transcripts to apply for financial aid.

Demand 32:

Hidden costs (e.g. additional transport costs that students need to pay from their own pockets) in blocks should be fully disclosed before students commence with the particular block and the Faculty should cover these costs for students who receive gap funding.

Demand 33:

The implementation of an appeals commission for financial exclusion of Health Sciences students.

Demand 34:

Fee breakdowns are to be transparent. Each course is to give an account of how the final amount is reached and for these details to be available to students for commentary and review.



**Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences**  
**INTloko: IFakalti yezeNzululwazi ngezeMpilo**  
**Dekaan: Fakulteit Gesondheidswetenskappe**

**Professor Bongani Mayosi**  
**Dean**

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Internet: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)

20 October 2016

Dear students and staff

## **Suspension of Classes in Years 1-3 of Undergraduate Programmes and Completion of Teaching and Examinations in a Mini-semester in January 2017**

The University of Cape Town opened on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2016 under conditions of student protest related to local University issues and the national demand for free decolonised education. All undergraduate face-to-face classes were subsequently suspended in other faculties within the University. However, in the Faculty of Health Sciences face-to-face classes, which are essential to teaching and learning, were continued with a view to completing all teaching activities in 2016.

Over the past three days, the Faculty has faced ongoing and widespread disruption of classes in the first three years of our undergraduate academic programmes which have made it intolerable to continue with the teaching and learning programme. Many students have not attended class because of their involvement in protest action at the University of Cape Town or given the stressful conditions they encountered in most teaching situations. This situation has unfortunately led to division and conflict amongst students, and high levels of stress amongst our staff. The conditions have deteriorated to a point where they are no longer conducive to teaching and learning.

The Dean and the Dean's Advisory Committee have decided to suspend all teaching and learning activities in Years 1-3 of all the undergraduate programmes, with a plan to complete teaching and examinations in a mini-semester in January 2017 (A mini-semester is a brief period of continued teaching on 2016 academic work at the start of 2017, followed by the final examinations that should have taken place in November 2016). We therefore anticipate that the first teaching activities of the 2017 academic year will start later than usual.

Since all teaching activities in Years 1 to 3 are being suspended, students are free to return home with immediate effect.

The Faculty is committed to partner with the Provincial and National Departments in providing health and social development support through service delivery and clinical teaching and training. The final year students in the Department of Health and Rehabilitation Studies and the 4th to 6th year students in the MBChB programme who receive clinical training on the health service platform will complete their studies in 2016.

Programme and year conveners will post details of the 2017 mini-semester teaching and assessment plans, including dates for students to return in 2017, on Vula within the next few weeks. Students who do not have access to Vula can contact Ms Brenda Klingenberg in the



Faculty Office by the end of November to establish when they must return to the University (tel 021 4066650).

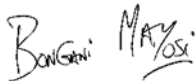
Should students have questions related to teaching activities at this stage, they are kindly asked to put those questions via their class representatives

- In the case of MBChB to Prof Graham Louw: [graham.louw@uct.ac.za](mailto:graham.louw@uct.ac.za)
- In the case of the Health & Rehabilitation Sciences to the Programme Conveners:
  - o A/Professor Roshan Galvaan (Occupational Therapy): [roshan.glavaan@uct.ac.za](mailto:roshan.glavaan@uct.ac.za)
  - o Ms Vivienne Norman (CSD): [vivienne.norman@uct.ac.za](mailto:vivienne.norman@uct.ac.za)
  - o Dr Soraya Maart (Physiotherapy): [soraya.maart@uct.ac.za](mailto:soraya.maart@uct.ac.za)

Anyone with concerns or queries about non-academic issues (such as accommodation, transport, etc) is invited to contact Ms Brenda Klingenberg in the Faculty Office (tel 021 406 6650 or [brenda.klingenberg@uct.ac.za](mailto:brenda.klingenberg@uct.ac.za)).

We trust that both students and staff will find some relief from the on-going stress in the weeks ahead. The Dean and the Dean's Advisory Committee commit themselves to doing everything in their power to continue with constructive dialogue aimed at finding solutions to our current crisis, in the interest of all of our staff and students.

Yours sincerely



Bongani Mayosi  
Dean



## VC announces passing of Professor Bongani Mayosi

27 JULY 2018

Dear colleagues and students

It is with profound sadness that I announce the passing away on Friday, 27 July, of Professor Bongani Mayosi, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town.

The university is in touch with Professor Mayosi's family, who is appreciative of all messages of support and condolences, but requests that their privacy be respected during this difficult time.

The family will liaise with the university for further communication at the appropriate time.

Yours sincerely

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng  
Vice-Chancellor

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Read previous communications:

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## Passing of Professor Mayosi

28 JULY 2018

Dear colleagues and students

Last night in a state of shock and devastation I informed the University of Cape Town community of the sudden passing of Professor Bongani Mayosi. I am still reeling. Since then we have visited the family to express our grief and offer condolences on behalf of the university and Council. Professor Mayosi was the best of us. On behalf of UCT I extend heartfelt condolences to his wife, Professor Nonhlanhla Khumalo, daughters S'vuyile and Camagu and the rest of the family. The executive is in contact with the family and has offered to assist in any way we can.

I also extend condolences to the students and colleagues in the Faculty of Health Sciences and across UCT, and in the wider health sector, who knew and worked with Professor Mayosi. I share with you in the profound sense of loss his sudden death brings.

Professor Mayosi was born on 28 January 1967 in Mthatha, Eastern Cape. He will be remembered for his scientific rigour and his dedication to improving public health. Last year a research team led by him made international headlines for identifying a new gene that is a major cause of sudden death by heart failure among young people and athletes. Professor Mayosi's involvement in this research included spending 20 years monitoring a South African family that was affected by this disorder. This is a testimony to his tenacious pursuit of pioneering research that can help save lives.

Professor Mayosi took up the position of Dean in September 2016. His A-rating from the National Research Foundation (NRF) counted him among the ranks of leading international researchers in the view of the NRF. In 2017 he was elected to the US National Academy of Medicine, one of the highest honours in the fields of health and medicine, awarded to individuals who have demonstrated outstanding professional achievement and commitment to service.



His numerous honours include: election to the Fellowship of the World Academy of Arts and Science (2013); South African Medical Association/Bonitas Medical Fund Merit Award for Health Research (2013); National Science and Technology Foundation – BHP Billiton Award (2012); National Research Foundation Award for Transforming the Science Cohort in South Africa (2011); and the Order of Mapungubwe, Silver (2009) to name just a few.

In pursuit of his research he developed valuable collaborations with academics in other countries (and especially across Africa) in researching the management of TB pericarditis, prevention of rheumatic heart disease, and genetics of heart disease. He also held numerous editorial responsibilities over his distinguished career and published more than 250 papers in peer-reviewed journals.

He earned two medical degrees with distinction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and worked as an intern at Livingstone Hospital in Port Elizabeth before joining UCT in 1992. He was admitted to the Fellowship of the College of Physicians of South Africa in 1995 and earned a doctoral degree at the University of Oxford in the UK in 2003. He was appointed head of the Department of Medicine at UCT in 2006.

Professor Mayosi's passing has shocked us as a campus community. I know many colleagues and students will feel the effects of this loss over the time ahead. This is a very sad time for us at UCT and difficult as it is, we will mourn the loss and celebrate the life of Professor Bongani Mayosi with the dignity and integrity that he embodied.

Yours sincerely

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng  
Vice-Chancellor

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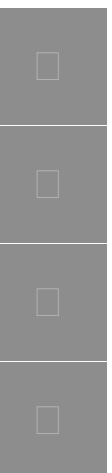
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## Building community after trauma

31 JULY 2018 | FROM KGETHI



Dear students and colleagues

There have been some media reports and social media posts that give the impression that I blame the death of Professor Bongani Mayosi on the protests in the higher education sector over the past three years. This is not true. I am writing to you now because it is so important that we understand the opportunity we have to reflect on the loss we have experienced and how we can become stronger, both as individuals and as a community.

What I said was that the protests of 2016 and 2017 were not kind to any of us at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and they were not kind to Professor Mayosi as Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences. His office was occupied for about two weeks in 2016. He had to manage pressure coming from many different directions, including from staff and students. And some black students were angry with him. They called him names, like coconut or sell-out, when his intentions were really for the students' best welfare.

I know how much Professor Mayosi loved UCT and the students here. He is the reason I applied for the position of Vice-Chancellor. He sat with me one day and explained that I needed to offer myself for this leadership role not for my own career but for the good of the institution, for the transformation of UCT. He knew that black students and staff members needed inspiration. That was one of his motivations in life: to inspire others to excellence in their studies and research and service to others.

He is not the only staff member at UCT to believe in the potential of our students. I see it in many colleagues, both in the academic arena and in the professional, administrative support and service staff. I believe that students come here to study because they know deep down that they have the potential to change South Africa and the world.

The things that happened during the protests over the past few years were hard on everybody. Many of our staff and students have been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and we have sadly lost some to suicide. Recently it was Professor Mayosi, and I worry about who might be next. There has been a rise in mental health issues at UCT, not just with students, but also with staff members. Some in our university community have become frightened to the point of being dysfunctional. Others are afraid to talk about their experiences and feelings because they do not want to be exposed to more verbal attacks.

I believe in the importance of activism and protest. Conflict is inevitable in any community where everything is subject to debate and academic rigour, but it does not have to be destructive. Our right to free speech is not meant to destroy us as a community or a country. It's supposed to build us, so we move into the future stronger than before.

The protests were not wrong in their intentions and goals. Differences of opinion are not wrong. But things were said and actions were taken that caused serious harm to people. Our struggle should not be about harming human beings but about dismantling systems of oppression. That is what protest today needs to be about – building UCT into a better institution, where students become leaders.

I cannot speak for the reasons that Professor Mayosi felt he could not carry on, but I do know how much he believed in UCT. Like him, I believe we can all bring excellence to a higher standard through transformation, but none of us can do this alone. We need to work together.

Sincerely

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng  
Vice-Chancellor

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