

UCT Protest is not about Cecil

Opportunity to engage with transformation

One of my responsibilities as UCT Ombud is to help identify unfairness in the system and highlight “hot-spots” for the university to intervene. Transformation has been one of the key areas of recommendations that kept coming up over the years. The University of Cape Town’s thinking on transformation has been evident in areas such as the creation of the Ombud’s office in 2011. This was a response to the 2007 survey on the various aspects of the work experience and climate at UCT. There have been other measures and specific interventions to address racism and racial harassment. Many of these have been on concept papers and dialogue platforms. I recall a question on “Who does UCT belong to?” which translated into the “MyUCT” concept.

Transformation is a pervasive issue at UCT. Given the highlighted need for more transformation, Cecil is not a name in history but his legacy is experienced by some of my visitors in the present, thus making the university reminiscent of the past. I doubt if statues, art and images at UCT would be a primary bother if the university life was different to what Rhodes conceptualized.

What now? One can appreciate that the students are simply asking for a date of the removal of the statue. UCT will have to look into substantial issues of transformation. “History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.” (Martin Luther King Jr.). The current climate gives UCT an opportunity to re-focus its transformation agenda, to develop and revive its communal spirit, and to be a true African university where all its members feel that they belong and are proud members of the association.

The Office of the Ombud is independent, confidential, informal and impartial.

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