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Re: Office furniture removed as UCT anticipates protests

Good day,

Your article titled "Office furniture removed as UCT anticipates protests" (03 September 2017) refers.

This article is a breach of at least two journalism principles – fairness and balance.

The story is heavily based on an incorrect claim that "the furniture at some administration offices at the University of Cape Town has been removed in fear of protest action that could begin on Monday".

Not only is this claim incorrect. But this was not put to UCT for a response. Vernac News sent a query with three questions on a Saturday morning. But none of these questions made reference to any claims of removed furniture. Thus, UCT was not given the right to reply to this incorrect claim.

As indicated in response to the email, Vernac News sent its questions on a Saturday and the responses necessitated that we consult with a number of departments. Such consultation could only be done during office hours. We indicated in response to the email that we were going to respond to these questions on Monday. It is baffling why the story could not be held until our response was forwarded so that the article became accurate, balanced and fair.

It is further baffling that Vernac News sent an email on a Saturday (outside working hours) and did not follow through with a text message or a phone call despite having the UCT media manager's cell number from previous responses sent to the publication. This cell number is also available on the UCT website.

While we will still forward a full response on Monday, we request that this story that is riddled with inaccuracies be updated to reflect the following:

- The incorrect claim that furniture has been removed from some UCT offices has not been put to UCT for a response. The UCT executive is not aware of any furniture that has been removed from any offices on campus. The executive would not take any precautionary measures against any anticipated peaceful and legitimate protest action.
- The UCT executive has continued to engage with the SRC on a number of issues. These discussions are taking place through various structures, including the Rapid Response Task Team, the Free Education Planning Group, and the Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission. The executive remains committed to these ongoing engagements.
- The UCT executive has honoured the commitment towards ensuring that all academically and financially eligible students are not excluded due to historic debt.

Earlier this year, almost 1 300 students applied for financial aid to enable them to either continue with their studies or graduate despite having historic debt.

A total of 1 173 applicants had successful financial aid appeals by the closing date in March. This comprised 803 students who were successfully assisted allowing them to continue their studies, while 370 received assistance to graduate.

The unsuccessful applications were due to a variety of reasons. These include applicants who are not in first-year or final year but did not get the 50% pass requirement set by NSFAS; students whose family income is above the UCT financial aid and GAP funding threshold (R600 000); applicants with post-graduate-debt; SADC and international students; and students with previous qualifications.

For 2016 graduates with debt, Absa and the First Rand Foundation generously provided over R6m to assist students with debt to graduate.

- All workers who were insourced have access to a number of full benefits, including pension / provident fund. It is important to state that the executive of UCT and many staff members have worked tirelessly over the last year to address issues and to ensure the smooth insourcing of workers at UCT. The executive is still in negotiations with unions and workers on issues that can be improved and will honour the ongoing commitment to resolve any issue that may arise.

But it must be made clear that the executive has already addressed multiple issues that were raised and that the conditions for insourced workers have improved significantly, with a reduction in working hours and even more significant increases in remuneration. In the process of insourcing, all staff were brought onto UCT's standard system of monthly wages, which is different from the previous basis of

pay on an hourly wage basis. The insourced staff are paid an all-in monthly package that covers all shifts and weekend work, which is between 59% and 96% more (in pay classes 2–5) than before the staff were insourced.

In addition to the increase in pay, insourced workers received further benefits when moving from Basic Conditions of Employment (BCEA), which most companies offered, to permanent staff at UCT.

We request that the inaccuracies in your story be rectified as a matter of urgency.

Regards,

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