



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

21 April 2018

Re: UCT's Price is set to lay criminal charges against #FeesMustFall students

Dear Editor

Your story in the Weekend Argus of 21 April 2018 with the headline: "UCT's Price is set to lay criminal charges against #FeesMustFall students" deserves a response.

Despite UCT giving the journalist some facts before publishing, a story was drafted that creates an entirely incorrect impression with the reader. This is regrettable and must be corrected.

The story claims and leaves the reader with the impression that the Vice-Chancellor, personally, is pursuing criminal charges against students. This personalisation is unfounded. The VC, himself has no involvement in laying or pursuing charges. Unlawful activity that happens on campus is reported to the SAPS by anyone on campus or by UCT's investigating team. The SAPS and Director of Public Prosecutions decides whether there are grounds to pursue the cases in court.

Secondly, the story appears to be triggered by charges that were laid during 2016 and 2017, some of these are now coming to court, but the story and headline give the impression that there are a new batch of charges about to be laid in connection with #FeesMustFall students.

We are unaware of any further criminal charges being laid. There are, however and unrelated, charges being laid against four students who allegedly threw poo in the residence kitchens three weeks ago, putting at risk the health of workers and students, closing the kitchens for several days, and causing serious disruption. This protest had nothing to do with #FeesMustFall.

The story implies that students are facing charges simply for participating in protests on campus. The truth of the matter is that charges (disciplinary within the UCT system but also externally with the SAPS) were brought against a number of students in 2016 and 2017 for protesting in a way that we believe is unlawful and criminal. No protesting student who behaves lawfully will face any charges.

The claim that the Vice-Chancellor intimidated the SRC president, Seipati Tshabalala is rejected, is defamatory and deserves an apology. The SRC president faces a charge that she, together with others, unlawfully broke through a door into an exam venue, brought the exam sitting to a standstill, used a loudhailer to disrupt the sitting, and forced students out of the exam venue. The Vice-Chancellor met with the SRC president subsequently to inform her of the evidence of this incident (a video had gone viral on social media) and that charges will be laid based on the unlawful behaviour. The claim of intimidation is strongly rejected.

In fact, he had no need to inform her that charges had been laid with the police and did so as a courtesy to alert her to the fact that as a result of charges being laid and the strength of the video evidence, she was likely to be arrested and he wanted to alert her to that fact so she could prepare how best to handle that rather than being surprised. The Vice-Chancellor regards the claim of intimidation as defamatory.

Furthermore, it was as a result of these exam disruptions in October 2017, and the ongoing threats by Tshabalala and others that they would shut down the exams, that the university went to great expense to centralise all the end of year exams into a marquee on the rugby fields, surrounded by a cordoned security zone, to prevent protesters from unlawfully disrupting the main exams that were to follow a week later.

The story also carries serious claims that an investigator at UCT, whom the Weekend Argus has named, has been harassing and intimidating students. We urge Tshabalala to do the responsible thing and lay a specific charge against the employee if she believes a claim to be true. The institution will then investigate the matter thoroughly. Making claims and spreading rumours in the media and naming individuals without doing the responsible thing of laying a charge, is irresponsible, unjust and opens the students up to litigation.

Regards,

Gerda Kruger

Executive Director
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town, South Africa
Tel: (021) 650 3732
E-mail: Gerda.Kruger@uct.ac.za

