chapter 14

Continuities and discontinuities in student leadership: Has co-operative governance failed?

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Introduction

In 2016, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) published *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy*, which took stock of 20 years of higher education transformation. In his foreword to the publication, the CEO of the CHE, Narend Baijnath, argued:

Higher education in South Africa in the post-apartheid era has never been more volatile than it is currently, some two decades into democracy, yet it is, contradictorily, perhaps the part of the entire education sector that has advanced most in terms of achieving national goals of quality, equity and transformation. There is much that higher education can claim to have achieved: integration as a system from its fragmented past; an established quality assurance and advisory body; a single dedicated national department; a fundamentally altered institutional landscape; greater access and a radical change in the demography of its students, with an 80 per cent growth in the number of African students; higher research output and international recognition through large research projects, more attention paid to teaching and learning, to curriculum and to student support; the implementation of a governing framework for its educational offerings; the allocation of financial aid to many more students than twenty years ago; and having nationally coordinated projects and grants to address some of the identified areas for improvement.
Despite the many advances and achievements of higher education outlined in this review, however, the student protests of 2015 and early 2016 have given expression to underlying faultlines in quite a dramatic way. The pressures of worsening underfunding in the context of enrolment growth, and increasing student expectations and frustrations with respect to access and financial aid, have led to widening fissures in the system. This review has identified, in addition to under-funding, the limits of academic staff capacity as a further crack in the foundations that threatens to widen and have a detrimental impact on the quality of provision.58

Baijnath’s argument is that despite the incisive changes in South African higher education, which were aimed at addressing the apartheid legacy of divided, unequal and highly inequitable provision, there remain ‘underlying faultlines’ in the system, as the 2015/16 student protests demonstrated. In particular, he notes underfunding in the face of the massification of black higher education, and related to that, growing student frustration with respect to access and financial aid as the main causes of the ‘widening fissures in the system’. He urges that ‘immediate solutions to the particular crisis that higher education finds itself in need to be found, but it is important that any future courses of action are informed both by rational analysis of empirical data, and reflection on and understanding of the directions, trends and trajectories of the system in the past’.59 In this chapter, we try to do precisely that.

With this final chapter, we seek to draw out a set of findings from a first analysis of the reflections of the 12 featured student leaders.60 To begin, we provide an analysis of the data as a whole. We then analyse the chapters in pursuit of responding to the tough questions asked in the opening chapter of this book:

- Has the post-apartheid regulatory framework for higher education governance failed?
- Have the provisions for student representation failed?
- Is there need for a reimagining of higher education governance and student leadership therein?

59 Ibid.
60 We say ‘a first analysis’ because it is our hope that other researchers will mine the material presented in this book more deeply and ask other questions of it. The original transcripts are also available from the HSRC’s national research repository, as long as research ethics clearance has been obtained.
Inevitably, the analysis in this chapter covers only certain issues and can only provide explanations for why students made the particular choices they did, or developed in certain ways, or behaved in certain manners, based on their own accounts. This predisposes the analysis to focus on rationalisations of actions informed by hindsight, which suggests paths chosen were more rational and deliberate and determined by individual agency than might actually have been the case, given the messiness of broader, sociocultural and political influencing factors. A much broader study of the macrosocial conditions that influenced the way in which student leaders understood their roles and the actions they took would provide deeper and possible alternative explanations for their decisions and behaviours, and this would be a fruitful avenue for further study. Questions that could be further pursued include: To what extent were leaders’ engagement styles – combative or based on boardroom-type negotiation – affected by their sociocultural contexts? To what extent were actions determined by relationships with national political bodies and are there any patterns to be observed? What influence did funding or the lack of it have on personal leadership choices?

The narratives presented suggest tantalising indications of political manipulation in some instances. Personal motivations were perhaps based more on individual need and aspirations than social justice ideals, and actions may have been based on far from clearly formulated notions such as ‘decolonisation’ than they are made out to be in the reflections. In short, there is a need for further study, for critical engagement with the reflections, and possibly much more work of a historical nature, to explore such complexities further.

Other areas for further study include an analysis of institutional responses to the issues raised by students to understand better how some continuities, such as funding and accommodation issues, have remained seemingly intractable. While the works of Jansen and Habib lay out the view from the perspective of university vice-chancellors, and our work provides the perspective from the point of view of SRC presidents and student leaders, a critical engagement with both perspectives, as well as with the views of national-level role players (e.g. in the Ministry of Higher Education, NSFAS, SAQA, etc.) remains to be done. The ongoing work on institutional cultures will also need to be broadened (to include universities beyond the usual suspects) and deepened, to understand better how different institutional leadership contexts framed the approaches, actions and effectiveness of student leaders and why and how they engage with and respond to the students’ voices.

61 We are grateful to the peer reviewers of the manuscript for pointing some of this out to us.
Continuities and discontinuities in a quarter-century of student leadership

Given the timespan of the book, the historical contexts of the individual chapters differ markedly. Some of the reflections from the earlier periods are situated in the immediate post-apartheid context, where the student leaders like Prishani Naidoo (chapter 3) were involved in debating questions on the implications of the transition to democracy, charting a new policy direction of higher education, and participating in the policy processes that eventually led to the 1997 ‘settlement’ enshrined in Higher Education White Paper 3 and the Higher Education Act of 1997. Student leaders from the following period had to deal with the question of how to make the new framework of co-operative governance work (see Jerome September, chapter 4), how to make student representation work within their institutions, while at the same time attending to matters such as student access, funding and success, and their correlates of academic and financial exclusions, to mention but a few.

As the general student body changed over two decades and began to resemble more closely the national demographics, so the elitist nature of higher education waned. In a representative, massified higher education system and institutions, the inequalities present in society at large become increasingly evident in higher education, presenting new challenges for student leadership and conflict with university managements, the Ministry and entities such as NSFAS. It is said that universities are a microcosm of society; as they are increasingly reflective of the broader society, they also reflect its stark contrasts, its division and the ills that are afflicting it, like inequality, poverty and the threat of unemployment, high levels of crime and violence, including gender-based violence. Student political culture will also more readily reflect the ways of engaging with politics in the communities students come from.\textsuperscript{63} Thus, if in the early 1990s littering on campus was considered a radical act of political protest and defiance, by the mid-2010s, the calling nature of fire had become one of the primary ways to gain the attention of an increasingly leaderless and unresponsive political class and university leadership.

A bird’s-eye view of student leaders’ reflections

Considering the full dataset, the content analysis of the data shows that what has been at the forefront of student leaders’ reflections in the foregoing chapters is always ‘students’, the ‘university’ and the ‘SRC’. These three terms are at the top of the list of our analysis of a tree map of the 100 most frequent (stemmed) words across the chapters. They are followed by terms like ‘issues’ and ‘politics’, ‘institutions’, ‘campus’, and ‘thinking’, and eventually

terms related to governance like ‘govern’, ‘leading’ and ‘leaders’ and ‘managing’. Among the most frequently noted words are also terms like ‘council’, ‘meetings’, ‘committees’, ‘structures’, ‘represent’ and ‘faculty’, which indicate the focus in the data on student representation and institutional structures of governance.

Another cluster of terms deals with the contentious nature of student politics: ‘struggle’, ‘activism’, ‘protest’ and ‘debate’. Then there are clusters of terms that deal with substantive matters like ‘learning’, ‘educational’ and ‘academic’, as well as ‘funding’, ‘financial’ and, relatedly, ‘#FeesMustFall’; and finally, a set of terms that indicate student leaders’ concerns beyond the campus and institution: ‘society’, ‘national’, ‘class’, ‘community’ and ‘people’. Figure 1 summarises this in a word cloud of the 50 most frequent (stemmed) words.

**Figure 1 Word cloud of student leaders’ reflections**

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**Transitions**

To mine the chapters’ insights more deeply, we find that there are accounts of various transitions, for example, the transition to democracy mentioned above, as well as accounts of the impact of the deep political conflicts at different times, such as the violence between the ANC and the IFP in KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Gauteng (see Sikhakhane, chapter 2).

Another broad transition evident as the chapters progress is the move from broad student anti-apartheid movements (from SANSCO, NUSAS and PASO), to the development of more formal structures, not only on campus but also nationally. On the one hand, this was done through the establishment of national federal student formations in different guises, e.g. SAU-SRC and SATSU first, and later,
SAUS. A contrary movement splintering the political compact in the student body occurred through the alignment of different student groups with national political parties. This started in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the establishment of student branches of the Young Communist League (YCL), the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), the Democratic Alliance Students Organisation (DASO) as well as a revival of the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) on some campuses. The Freedom Front Plus and AfriForum emerged on some historically Afrikaans campuses in the mid-2000s, and in the 2010s the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC) began to mushroom. SASCO aligned itself with the ANCYL and YCL in the form of the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA), albeit not without occasional in-fighting and breakaways (see, for example, Sokhaba, chapter 12).

The more direct role of political parties in mediating campus-based interests, and even directly influencing student activities on party-political lines, becomes ever more apparent in later chapters. Most of the accounts are from leaders who were members of the majority party elected, but as a counterpoint to these narratives are those from leaders who found themselves effectively in opposition to the dominant SRC, like Hlomela Bucwa in her first term (chapter 11), or part of a minority in terms of race or gender, like David Maimela (chapter 6).

**The SRC and the student body**

One of the continuities is the difference in experience between those SRC leaders who served for more than one term compared with others who only served one term. It seems to be a common view that it takes a long time to become familiar with the formal processes and how universities work, such that those serving just one term do not seem to get to participate in ways that ensure that the co-operative governance processes are effective.

The ways in which student leaders engage and communicate with their student constituencies and the broader student body have also changed over time. From the second half of the 1990s, there is the emergence of student parliaments as a vehicle to engage with the broader student body and student formations, with more or less success, depending on the particular institutional context. Some leaders from the earlier periods describe how they used basic print media (newsletters, pamphlets and posters) and direct meetings for communicating with the student body; more recent accounts highlight the importance that electronic media – first email and eventually Facebook and other social media – has had on the way in which students can be informed, conscientised and mobilised around particular causes and events.

As one of the contributors commented about the fee campaigns of 2015/16:

> They realised it laid in a simple hashtag – that was our Arab Spring moment! – the power of social media. And so, they were able to craft that into a simple
Catchy slogan: #FeesMustFall says it all. It was all encapsulated into that. (September, chapter 4)

With respect to SRC administration and budgeting, there are significant differences between how these were managed at different institutions as well as across time. In some instances, particularly in historically black university contexts, SRCs seemed to have had access to large budgets with few checks and balances in place (as Bafo’s chapter 5 indicates), while in others, these were administered by Student Affairs divisions, consequently with higher levels of scrutiny and tighter oversight. A number of student leaders speak to the importance of ensuring that the incumbent SRC provided entertainment (for electoral purposes!), particularly in the context of the post-liberation ‘Boom Shaka’ generation, and attest to how budgets were often used for ‘bashes’, and sometimes even for corrupt money-making schemes. As one said, somewhat acerbically, about the way organising a bash would work: ‘You call SAB and SAB comes in. You say, “Give us stock for R80 000; we give you a cheque of R80 000.” We sell that stock, whatever we got as profit, we shared amongst ourselves.’ The roles played by Student Affairs divisions thus differed across different contexts; in some, they played a developmental, educational and supportive role, providing administrative guidance and oversight and a sense of continuity, being repositories of institutional memory and sources of institutional capacity, while in others, they seemed to rely on student ideas and issues to justify their existence (see Madlala, chapter 9).

Many of the contributions detail the multiple roles of an SRC. Lorne Hallendorff in chapter 10 outlines them as follows: identify social justice issues on campus and champion them; have an active and involved voice in policy development in the institution (e.g. fees, timetable); be a service delivery watchdog; and build community and cohesion in the student body (e.g. using sports). Beyond these, others speak to the role of SRCs beyond the institution in influencing national debates and in playing a conscientising role among students with respect to the serious issues of the day.

Substantive issues and demands
Despite the long timeline from 1994 to 2017, there is a continuous thread running through all the chapters about an enduring struggle against exclusion – financial exclusion, academic exclusion, and exclusion from knowledge deemed relevant by students, and from the systems and values that ought to underlie higher education in a democratic South Africa. While the language and concepts have changed across the periods, and ‘transformation speak’ has given way to theories of decolonisation in some quarters, the central student concerns have remained doggedly similar.

The key issues are well known: academic and financial exclusions, student funding, student accommodation, institutional transformation and institutional culture
Student fees, institutional cultures and the curriculum

The issue of student fees is writ large as one of the main continuities in terms of the issues with which SRCs have had to contend. Access to higher education for black and female students and for poor and working-class students is an enduring issue running through the narratives, although the focus changes over the years from struggles against financial exclusions, to attempts at making NSFAS work, and eventually #FeesMustFall. Even as the #FeesMustFall campaign progressed, there was a shift within the student movement from keeping higher education affordable to making it altogether free for the poor and ‘missing middle’. Given the correlation between race and class in South Africa as a legacy of colonialism and apartheid, the issue of student fees has always been a double social justice imperative, namely to redress the inequality of student access in terms of both race and class. How the related debate lived itself out in terms of the admission policy of an elite university can be seen in Hallendorff’s reflections (chapter 10).

In the earlier accounts, there is some concentration on institutional culture and curriculum transformation, but there is relative silence on these matters until the accounts in the later years of the period, particularly in the explosive times of 2015/16, and in relation to the way the #RhodesMustFall movement has taken up the matter. Where student parliaments had been relatively quiet, suddenly they emerge alongside the campus-based movements and campaigns (like #OpenStellenbosch and #AfrikaansMustFall) to fulfil the roles that had been intended for the institutional forums which, in many institutions, had largely become de facto defunct in the middle part of the period under discussion, or had been side-lined as just another procedural hurdle in the governance process.

Behind the narratives it is clear that in the earlier years, much energy was being expended on establishing a new order within a social justice agenda – new structures and processes, and new ways of funding students through NSFAS. Somewhat mirroring the national context, in the middle part of this period, in which neoliberal concerns were uppermost and many institutions were dealing with the exigencies of mergers and incorporations, the social justice discourse seems to have become displaced and individualised by the struggle for the financial survival of students. This struggle was seen to be largely confined to rural and historically
Continuities and discontinuities in student leadership

black institutions, which, despite perennial student protests, did not occupy centre stage and were largely ignored by public media. When the systems that had been set up, such as NSFAS, began to founder under inefficiencies and the sheer weight of expectation and demand, and when the problems could no longer be dealt with through special programmes designed to ‘patch up’ the system, and when a critical mass of need finally struck the historically white institutions, the system was ripe for all the underlying issues of poverty on campus, racism, sexism and harassment to surface in student protests that exploded relatively suddenly. All this happened in spite of ongoing research into the student experience which showed how fast the kettle was boiling.64

**Student protests**

Student protests are an enduring feature of SRC tenures in most of the accounts in this book, particularly where the formal processes are considered to be too slow to respond adequately to student grievances. As Maimela argues:

> If you look at the history of higher education instability, or rather contestation, at the ups and downs of the higher education sector in terms of stability, every few years it shows some form or another of upheaval or instability that reaches a boiling point. So the emergence of the #FeesMustFall movement is not an outlier and it is not a new phenomenon but rather a continuation of that kind of a thing. (Maimela, chapter 6)

The accounts also detail a repertoire of strategies and tactics for articulating student needs, which become ever more radical and destructive, and different reasons for student protests. Sometimes, as some leaders admit, protests were used to placate constituencies and to be ‘seen to be doing something’. In some contexts, student protests were not necessarily about substantive issues, but were intertwined with local politics and an expression of partisan and factional battles beyond the campus. However, as Sokhaba from UWC instructs:

> But protests, I want to put it, protests are not occurring willy-nilly or sporadically just out of the blue. Students call mass meetings. Mass meetings chart the way forward for what is the agenda and also debate the agenda. People think that it’s purely just anarchic passions being thrown around. No! Mass meetings have got structure; they are chaired and there are interactions. (Sokhaba, chapter 12)

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Another point about protest marches that was raised by some leaders is that, whereas some protests may have seemed intimidatory to university managers, they were not really intended to be. Mpho Khati speaks in chapter 13 of the singing of old and new struggle songs during protest marches as a way to unite students and express a common feeling. As she says,

The idea of the singing, I think, it is just to build a momentum because you don't just want to be walking there … Sometimes students would just be singing for fun, because they enjoy singing and running around. I don't think it crossed our minds to say, ‘Let's sing to intimidate Prof.’ (Khati, chapter 13)

Jerome September (chapter 4) provides an insightful general list of the main reasons for protests. Among the top reasons September notes are: slow and stalled decision-making processes in universities, which can drag on beyond an SRC term; a lack of political will by a university leadership or students to follow through on a particular issue; that management doesn't understand the urgency by which students need their matters addressed and, conversely, student leaders also need a ‘quick win’ to be seen to be achieving something. But then, he adds, there is often comfort and certainty in the long-winded decision-making processes of a university as a surety that any long-term decision has been well considered.

The biographical impact of participation in student leadership

A final continuity evident from the reflections of the interviewed student leaders is the seminal nature of their student leadership experience to their further development – irrespective of how rewarding, frustrating or traumatising it may have been. For most, the impact has been life-changing. As one put it:

That was the transformative moment for me … What I was when I arrived to what I was when I left student life; it's two different people. It took my life on a journey that I don't think it would have gone on, had I not had that experience. Absolutely fantastic. To this day, it's the lessons I learnt then that I can apply to my role and to my job. (September, chapter 4)

September's career in student affairs and services is certainly an important case. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see how most former student leaders have moved from politics and political activism to becoming professionals, mostly with a public service orientation. Almost half are in active public service positions in national government departments, a public entity, or in local or provincial government. Two are practising law, one is a municipal councillor and another was a Member of Parliament at the time of interviewing. Two work in university contexts, one as
an academic, another as a senior student affairs professional, while another two are active in the private sector as entrepreneurs.

In all cases, their student leadership experience did not come without sacrifices, in some cases triggering depression, yet all reflect on how the experience eventually improved their self-confidence, their ability to speak in public and think on their feet, their agility and their ability to deal with difficult situations. For a number of them, the experience gave expression to their fundamental impulses to improve the lives of people around them in one way or another.

Student activism by its very nature is a temporary thing. It’s an episode in one’s life, and one can’t be a student activist forever. By its very nature, it doesn’t outlast graduation. But of course, there are things to be done in society and when you graduate, you must find your rule book to pursue the values you thought you were pursuing. And they don’t have to be in political parties. (Sikhakhane, chapter 2)

As evidenced in their accounts, the student leaders have all attempted to write their rule books in the different trajectories their lives have followed after their student leadership mandate.

Student representation

One of the core themes in this book that is dealt with in this chapter is student representation, and how it has changed over time and in different contexts. In the earlier narratives, we noted scepticism, but also some enthusiasm, regarding the implementation of co-operative governance and the formalising of student representation in structures and SRC roles. There are discernible differences in SRCs’ approaches, with some being able to use the formal structures more or less effectively, and others finding them too long-winded and obstructionist for addressing student issues. Against the background of the 2015/16 student protests, we started the journey of traversing almost a quarter of a century of student leadership in South Africa by asking the questions: Has the post-apartheid regulatory framework for higher education governance failed? Have the provisions for student representation failed? Is there need for a new reimagining of higher education governance and student leadership therein? We asked these questions in light of the stark reality that despite the provisions of co-operative governance and the statutory means that provide for student interest representation, and various other ways to alert university leaders to student concerns, student protests are a recurrent and frequently violent part of life on many South African university campuses. To focus on these questions specifically, the next section revisits the regulatory framework for student representation and then analyses student leaders’ reflections on higher education governance and student representation in more detail.
Student leaders’ experiences: has co-operative governance failed?

The national regulatory framework for higher education sprang from a historical moment informed by the transition from apartheid to a democratic system of governance in the national political arena. In the face of a crippling apartheid legacy and pressing demands for a reform and reconstitution of the higher education sector, a new higher education policy set out to profoundly transform and democratise, reconstruct and develop the sector. In 1995, President Mandela appointed the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) to advise the minister responsible for higher education on *inter alia* the constitution of higher education; goals for higher education; the institutional landscape; the governance of the system of higher education and its institutions. In its final report, the NCHE provided a succinct analysis of the apartheid legacy in higher education and charted a way forward for the transformation of higher education.

The NCHE proposed ‘co-operative governance’ as a model of decision-making for the higher education system as a whole as well as for the governance of institutions. In the conception of the NCHE, co-operative governance was to be understood within the context of the transformation and restructuring of the higher education sector as a set of principles, structures and procedures that could accommodate the different interests of higher education role players and effect policy compromises.

The proposals of the NCHE were given effect in the Higher Education White Paper 3 (White Paper) and the Higher Education Act of 1997 (HE Act). In terms of governance, the White Paper argued that ‘the governance of higher education at a system-level is characterised by fragmentation, inefficiency and ineffectiveness, with too little co-ordination, few common goals and negligible systemic planning. At the institutional-level, democratic participation and the effective representation of staff and students in governance structures is still contested on many campuses.’ Therefore, the White Paper argued, ‘the transformation of the structures, values and culture of governance is a necessity, not an option, for South African higher education’.

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67 Ibid., pp. 171-172.
68 SASCO, however, rejected the final report of the NCHE, holding protests against it nationwide. A memorandum to the minister of education noted amongst the demands of SASCO, that broad transformation forums should be established with fully vested powers (unlike the IF), that SASCO and SRCs should be recognised, and privatisation of services on campuses should end (*Varsity*, 1996f).
70 Ibid., Section 3.1.
Co-operative governance thus provides for specific governance structures at national and institutional level, their composition, delineated functions and relationship to other bodies and it identifies a set of higher education constituencies. Moreover, the principle of democratisation of governance in higher education implies a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance in the interaction between different constituent groups that is conducive to a well-ordered and peaceful community life. Concretely, this involves a composition of governing bodies which should be representative of all affected groups and processes of decision-making that are democratic, participatory, transparent, and able to hold the leadership accountable.

The analysis across all twelve chapters of the former student leaders’ reflections shows that in the early and mid-1990s, there was still a debate in the student movement as to the place of students in decision-making on higher education. In the later periods there is considerable variation in the way student leaders approach co-operative governance arrangements, differing between institutions, the personalities and cultures of managements, and the effectiveness of student representation, vacillating between trying to make formal representation work, and engaging in alternative ways of voicing student interests.

The lost debate on transforming higher education governance

The chapter by Prishani Naidoo illustrates some aspects of the debate in the student movement in the mid-1990s around student representation. She recalls how in her time in the Wits SRC of 1995/96, ‘the discussions and debates started happening whether we sit on Council or not’. One of the fears of student leaders was that the SRC would become ‘part of the university management, and we will be making decisions about other students’. At the same time, there was also the debate about the actual organisation of university governance, ‘this idea that the Broad Transformation Forum would replace the Council’, and that the ways universities were governed would fundamentally change. However, as Naidoo correctly argues, ‘the whole critique that was there from the early 90s about existing structures of governance got lost’ (Naidoo, chapter 3).

A legacy of the early debates on the lack of legitimacy of councils and senates – not only because they were demographically not representative but also because they did not reflect the aspirations of a transformed, progressive higher education governance culture and structure – was the statutory creation of the Institutional Forum as an internal transformation advisory structure, and the principles underpinning co-operative governance.

Jerome September recalls, for instance, that during his two terms in the UCT SRC (1997/98 and 1998/99), there was a serious attempt by the SRC to practise co-operative governance. The UCT SRC accepted the kind of changes proposed in the 1997 HE Act, which meant that the SRC appointed student representatives to participate in Council and Senate. At the same time, the executive committee of the Broad Transformation Forum of UCT now became the Institutional Forum.
Accordingly, ‘what it would mean for us [was] to sit on these committees and be so-called co-governors’ (September, chapter 4). September felt, however, that the new governance system was not really designed to empower students:

At times I was feeling that this is a way we are actually being managed, because suddenly all the energy must go to this structure as opposed to previously where you could just march or write a petition or do whatever. (September, chapter 4)

In Naidoo’s recollection of her participation as SRC vice-president, she is also quite critical of the new way of ‘managing student leadership’. Her recollection was the feeling of being overwhelmed by having to wade through thick agendas – ‘these thick documents with pink, green and yellow pages’ – and participate in discussions that she ‘hated’, not being able to impact on the agenda-setting and being told in the course of discussions that ‘your voices have been heard and you have been consulted’, as if this would settle a matter. Naidoo remembers how she said to the senior professor who had put her down that ‘consultations don’t just legitimise a process’, but that having been heard must mean that ‘you must have some impact on the process’ (Naidoo, chapter 3).

As these examples show, from the earliest days of implementing co-operative governance, student leaders felt that this was not really working in their favour. And it was clear already then, as Naidoo says:

We got disillusioned in that time because we were being frustrated by buying into a process and then not having our grievances addressed in ways that we thought were acceptable. (Naidoo, chapter 3)

The logical conclusion was to go back to protesting when necessary, as ‘you will never win anything at the table that you can’t win in the streets’ (Naidoo, chapter 3). The relatively timid protesting at the time – which included things like throwing over dustbins – was taken most seriously up to the highest level. As Naidoo recalls:

I think it was in 1995 that Nelson Mandela summoned all student leaders to the Union Buildings … He just lectured us for like 45 minutes about the need for us to be more disciplined on campuses in that kind of fatherly reprimanding voice: ‘I will bring my army and police into your campus if you do not stop with this nonsense. Just tell me what you want, I will go to Anglo-American, I will go and get the money for you … Get your honours, get your master’s, get your PhDs.’ That was his line. ‘Leave it to us to do the other work.’ (Naidoo, chapter 3)
In short, it would appear that a relationship that has since become normalised emerged already in the early days of post-apartheid higher education governance and leadership. The manner in which student representation in co-operative governance operates in practice is inadequate for a number of reasons (which will be considered in more detail below). Student leadership therefore requires that certain student grievances are taken ‘to the streets’; and the response of university leaders and government is ‘leave it to us’, along with using repressive means to suppress resistance.

**Trying to make co-operative governance work**

The 1997 settlement meant that SRCs became an integral part of a university’s decision-making structures and, with their participation, SRCs co-legitimised the structures, processes and operations, no matter their actual efficacy in terms of addressing student demands. For some incoming SRCs, there was sufficient institutional memory, support and continuity to understand quickly how to organise themselves for representation in the governance structures. Where these are lacking, there was a lot of confusion, as the reflections in chapter 5 of Mlungisi Bafo, former SRC president of UWC, show.

In some cases, the SRC constitution provides guidelines on which SRC portfolio officer is supposed to sit on which committee. In other cases, such guidance is not available, as Kwenza Madlala, former SRC general secretary and SRC president from Mangosuthu University of Technology, recalls:

> In terms of our constitution, there is nothing enshrined in there about committee allocations. How we used to do it, is that we were identified in terms of the responsibilities of the portfolio. For example, in the academic calendar committee as well as the Senate, we would have our faculty officer in there, because the faculty officer deals with academic exclusions and all those kinds of related academic issues.

> We would also maybe go a bit beyond just the portfolios of the office and look into each individual's knowledge and expertise. So if for example, we had me who is in HR and we had an HR committee, then I would be representing there. Each member sat in two committees. And then at Council level, we would have the president and the secretary of the SRC. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Trying to match individual SRC members’ interests, knowledge and expertise with the focus of a committee is therefore one way in which SRCs have tried to live up to the challenge. However, a frequent mention in the accounts is the need for training. How can students be expected to participate effectively in university governance structures without having been trained and without receiving ongoing support? Madlala argues:
Council is very critical for the SRC to be involved there. The manner in which it happens, still today, I feel that there is a lot of training and development that needs to take place so that student leaders understand their involvement and participation at that level.

It is important that they are there; it is another debate what their role should be when they are there. Some issues that are dealt with there are confidential; some issues that are dealt with require a particular level of comprehension of issues. And there’s not a single training that you get before you go and sit in those structures. And you are just a student, you know. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Madlala’s reflections also show that he feels student representation at the highest levels of university governance is important, not only in Council but also in Senate, ‘where issues of curriculum are dealt with; issues of academic exclusion and inclusion are engaged. So, it’s important that the students’ voices are heard there’ (Madlala, chapter 9). His argument overall is that there should be ‘nothing about us, without us’. He notes that there are other important committees for students, for example, the academic calendar committee.

It’s a very important committee as well, because there are sometimes realities that the SRC brings into perspective. For example, it’s easy for the institution to say, ‘Classes will commence on 23rd January.’ But the reality is that registration will not be closed by then because of some financial difficulties and all of those things. You may end up now having people that are attending and some people that are still trying to register, and already they start on the back foot. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Zuki Mqolomba, former SRC president of UCT, also feels strongly about the importance of student representation in university committees, and about extending it further.

Students only had two representatives of students at Council level, and a few student leaders were represented at Senate level, but mostly we were represented at Institutional Forum level. We had about 10 candidates represented in the transformation committee at the Institutional Forum level. So at least there we were represented, but at Council and Senate there was little representation. So, we struggled to ensure that the student agenda was progressively realised on the campus. (Mqolomba, chapter 8)

When Hlomela Bucwa (chapter 11) became a member of the SRC of Nelson Mandela University and eventually its SRC president, she found that the provisions for the SRC to represent students in a number of important governance structures and committees gave it much power to influence decision-making at the university.
We realised how powerful the SRC is: we sat on the transformation committee, we sat on Senate, Council, the safety committee, the library committee, there was the IF – the Institutional Forum which makes critical decisions – we even sat on the tender committee. We sat on the committee dealing with screening the applications when we were looking for the new DVC and we sat on the selection panel as well. We sat in most ManCord and we had quarterly ManCord meetings with management.

The university also had a Student Support Services Council, so the SRC executive met once a month with the dean of students, the director of student governance, the officer of student housing and residences as well. So, we did have representation. And then, the faculty reps will sit on faculty boards. What we further advocated for that year was representation in the committees dealing with appeals and exclusion because there was previously no students. And that helped to decrease the exclusion rate, especially in that year. There was a bit of accountability. (Bucwa, chapter 11)

Bucwa further argues that the authority of the SRC comes from being able to represent the student experience authentically, justifying student involvement by what Aristotle called ‘the expertise of the affected’ which is encapsulated in the analogy ‘only the wearer of the shoe knows where it pinches’.

Overall, these reflections of the former student leaders are thus supportive of formal student representation on existing governance structures in general. At the same time, they raise several important points: one argument is that having more student representatives on a particular governance structure or committee would make student representation more effective; another is the need for training and support to bridge the gap between the ‘novice’ student representatives and representatives of other constituencies that have longer terms and more experience. A third point is about the sources of an SRC’s authority, namely its ability to represent students’ views authentically as well as its potential to mobilise students to take a matter ‘to the streets’. In all of this, the rapport between SRC and university leadership will also be critical. The following sections engage with these points more deeply.

How many student representatives should there be in a particular structure?

The question of how many student representatives should be involved in a particular governance structure and its committees leads into a deep philosophical debate about the nature of representation, which is at the heart of the frustration that student leaders express with the co-operative governance model. As argued above, the policy-based conception of student representation provides some guidance, however cryptic – from the manner of appointment of student representatives, the composition of the different governance structures, to rules in terms of the roles
of representatives – that hint at the different manners by which a constituency's interests can or ought to be represented. In political theory, two fundamentally different manners of representation are distinguished as the ‘trustee model’ and the ‘delegate model’.

In the trustee model, it does not really matter how many representatives a particular constituency has in a decision-making structure as the task of the representatives is to serve their constituents by exercising ‘mature judgement’ and ‘enlightened conscience’ (as Burke expressed it). Trustee type representatives have discretionary authority to act in their best judgement on behalf of the constituency. This also means that trustees may be persuaded by the force of another trustee’s argument to change their view in the ‘enlightened’ debate that ought to happen in a decision-making structure. The delegate model, in contrast, does not afford the representative discretionary authority. Rather, the representative acts on a mandate and is meant to serve as a mere conduit to convey this mandate to the forum. If the argument does not win the day and a compromise is required, a new mandate must be sought from the constituency.

In university governance structures and committees there is typically the idea that a representative should act as an ‘enlightened’ trustee. For example, the HE Act stipulates that ‘the members of a council … must participate in the deliberations of the council in the best interests of the public higher education institution concerned’. It is therefore the institutional interest, rather the interest of a particular constituency, that representatives are ‘trustees’ of. Others also argue that ‘having a representative merely as a delegate would make fruitful rational deliberation difficult and render representative committees or councils quite useless’. The question of how many representatives from a particular constituency should be on a committee is therefore less important, but the general argument is that ‘allocations [of membership] should be determined with the purposes of the university in mind – which implies that groups whose activities are more centrally concerned with those purposes, such as faculty and students, should have greater representation’.

Most of the former student leaders have, however, a different view of how student representation and decision-making in university structures should operate, and where they are able to put in place a functioning way of operating during their short terms, they tend to operate on a ‘mandate’ basis. The reflections

73 HE Act (1997), Section 27(7)b.
of two former SRC presidents from very different institutions illustrate this. Madlala from MUT recalls:

I put in place a modus operandi of the way things should be that we caucused committee agendas. But sometimes it becomes impractical with the kind of load, particularly in the kind of university where the SRC becomes too operational … Ideally at times, we would call in the Progressive Youth Alliance, we would call the chairs and secretaries and say we are going to Council in a week’s time. Or maybe even before that, because you need to put in agenda items too, which closes some time before Council: ‘What are the issues that we need to put in the agenda?’ We did at times. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Similarly, Hallendorff from UCT argues:

We tried to work on the basis that people who were appointed to committees needed to keep abreast of the major issues and decisions coming to those committees and bring those matters to SRC meetings. The matter would be discussed and the SRC would take a position. The student representative would then attend the next university committee meeting with a mandate from the SRC. SRC members were expected to argue the SRC’s position at committee level rather than a personal view. (Hallendorff, chapter 10)

The argument here is that in order to improve the quality of decisions taken, it was preferrable for agenda matters to be debated at constituency level, i.e. in the full SRC (or even involving the student assembly), and the student representative would then bring a mandate into a governance structure such as Council, Senate or any of their committees. The trade-off was that it would increase the workload of SRC members and that ‘the pace of decision-making slows down’ (Hallendorff, chapter 10).

The notion of ‘caucusing’ committee agendas implies that a particular student representative would enter a committee with a mandate. However, as Naidoo’s earlier reflections aptly illustrate, the student view may easily be without impact. The same sense of a lack of impact is also implied in Hallendorff’s comments on the emergence of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall:

We tried to tackle issues that were a concern for students at the time. Issues such as admissions policy criteria, fee increases and outsourcing of support services such as cleaning and security. I think we were taking an approach that was more in line with how it was expected to be. We mostly used the regular avenues of writing a proposal, taking it to the relevant meeting, having it escalated based on the governance structure and so on. I was trying to get student leaders at the time to attempt this approach as much as possible, arguing that the best argument in the room will win. (Hallendorff, chapter 10)
While Hallendorff argues that ‘as a first port of call, it is very important to show that the approach of reasoned argument was attempted’, he does not exclude ‘a more radical approach if reasonable argumentation falls on deaf ears’. Hence, as far as the UCT student demands related to #RhodesMustFall are concerned, or those of #FeesMustFall, he argues, like others, that he was not surprised by the emergence of this wave of protests, precisely because the same matters had been raised continuously year after year without any success. In other words, it would appear that the argument – however well or badly presented – fell on deaf ears for years.

What emerges from the views of the former student leaders is that a fully fledged way of operating in a ‘mandated representative’ manner is not accommodated in university governance structures and committees, and it requires the kind of support for student leadership that only few universities can provide. University management members and many academics tend to prefer a ‘managed approach’ to keep meetings few and short and to move through the packed agendas of committees expeditiously. This, however, does not always afford student representatives a generous consideration of students’ views. If students insist, the result may be at best that an agenda item is deferred to a task team, sub-committee or later meeting, to afford it more thorough consideration. This then misses the point of the urgency with which students often need their grievances addressed – which September noted above as one of the reasons for protests. What alternatives are there for student concerns to be raised?

**Marching and handing over memoranda as alternatives**

There are discernible differences in SRCs’ approaches to representing student interests. Some, like Hallendorff and Madlala, used the formal structures more or less effectively, while others had to bypass them for various reasons (see Maimela, chapter 6), or found them too long-winded and even obstructionist in addressing student issues. Mpho Khati, former vice-president of the SRC of the University of the Free State, tells a story that resonates widely:

So, for example, you would submit an issue, like the issue of the shuttle system, or free internet … And then they will say: ‘You have to submit it to Council, and Council will present it to the university Senate.’ But these bodies, they don’t sit every day. Now it is the beginning of your term, and they will say Council will sit in March. And the central SRC will sit in March. You sit as the central SRC including the Qwaqwa SRC president and you submit these issues. And then they’ll say, ‘Okay, we acknowledge these issues, we’ll submit them to Senate in June.’ They submit them to Senate, and by the time you get a response it’s nearing the end of your term. The new SRC repeats this same process. So, there are these many structures in between that frustrate you as an SRC and make you look like you are not doing work. But they’ll
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say, ‘It’s bureaucracy; things must happen, you can’t just make decisions, it’s a university, we’re not running a spaza shop.’ (Khati, chapter 13)

As the former leaders’ reflections show, student issues are based on a problem that has been identified and needs urgent attention – like transport or access to the internet – and once a matter like this comes to the attention of an SRC, it has typically already gathered a fair amount of frustration in the student body as a whole. To address such issues requires leadership and management skills, and a sensitivity to student issues, and responsiveness on the part of university leadership. Moreover, given their short terms in office, SRCs need to be seen to deliver effectively and to have a legacy which they can refer back to in the coming elections. Looking back, an SRC member needs to be able to say: ‘We brought free internet to campus’ or ‘the shuttle system was started because of our SRC’ as much as a student organisation needs to be able to say the same when canvassing in the next election. Some accounts indicate that this was often not understood by university leaders who could have instituted interim measures that swiftly responded to a student concern, while the permanency of a new operational policy or service could still have been considered in governance structures.

When student leaders perceive a comment such as ‘it’s a university, we are not running a spaza shop’ as patronising and arrogant, they will find alternative ways of voicing student grievances. A frequently mentioned alternative to the committee route is to submit memorandums. Khati reflects:

Our main tactic was just submitting memorandums. With a memorandum you would get a 48-hour response as opposed to waiting for Senate to sit ... students do not understand these frustrating processes. People get agitated – so we will present a memorandum. (Khati, chapter 13)

Several of the former student leaders in the foregoing chapters talk about the tactic of submitting memorandums as a way of getting the attention of university leadership and having grievances addressed more speedily (e.g. Madlala from MUT, Mqolomba from UCT, and Bucwa from NMU). Khati also describes the process of making a memorandum in detail in her chapter.

Typically, the handing over of a memorandum is the culmination of a protest march to a university leadership’s main offices. It may also be, like Bucwa reflects, published in social media and gain the sought-after attention of the authorities in this way:

So, we had a march. It looked like a joke to some people because there was like 50 of us. But the impact it had when we posted that thing on social media, when we attached the memorandum, the university responded. (Bucwa, chapter 11)
The ‘deadline’ set for a response to a memorandum is often linked to the threat of protest. In this respect, it is a rather brutal way of setting an ultimatum. As Khati argues (and the experience of her SRC during Prof. Jansen’s vice-chancellorship shows), it is, however, more effective than the formal route. Nonetheless, the reception of a memorandum (or other kind of student submission) may sometimes be frustrating. As Madlala remembers,

When I first sat in Council, the very first meeting we sat in Council, we had prepared a memorandum of two, three pages on various issues. Council took about two to three hours correcting grammatical errors on our document. Grammatical errors! The content – they could see what we were trying to say. We tried to write this document in English; we are not English-speaking. But they took about two to three hours, and that is breaking young students who have got a potential to become something in future. So those kinds of things; this bureaucratic processes and all that; the university must guard against.

(Madhala, chapter 9)

Madlala’s reflection is a telling – if perhaps dramatised – account of yet another way in which student representatives feel they are being belittled rather than developed in conditions of extreme inequalities of power. Throughout the book we encounter student leaders’ reflections on constellations of authority where their agency and subjectivity is under immense stress as they seek to represent the student voice. In a context where there are such porous boundaries between student representation and protesting, some of the reported attitudes and behaviours of senior managers and councillors (as encountered, for instance, in Madlala’s account) fall short of reflecting a governance philosophy of mutual respect and tolerance.

SRC relationship with management

A university’s senior leadership plays a key role in setting the tone for the manner of engaging with student leaders. This section highlights some of the reflections of the former student leaders about good and bad relations, informal meetings, and the way university leaders can indeed play a leadership role even when it comes to student issues. But what leadership approach is appropriate in a co-operative governance context? Muzi Sikhakhane shares his view:

I suppose leadership is never a position of extremes. Leadership by its nature is a centrist position, and it’s about managing contradictions better to achieve whatever it is you set yourself to achieve …

I think that engagement about real issues rather than just ideological waffling works better. Because all human beings, if you sit with them closely, they do want justice, they do want freedom. What curtails them is their own
prejudices and their past that they bring to a discussion about the present.  
(Sikhakhane, chapter 2)

In Sikhakhane’s view then, leadership in a university context is about addressing opposing views by way of sitting together closely on equal terms, seeking to find the common ground, and creating a common understanding and compromise. In some cases, a university leadership may need to display more wisdom in engaging with student interests than an SRC itself may display. A prime example thereof is recalled by David Maimela when the predominantly white SRC of UP did not adequately represent the specific issues that black students experienced in the mid-2000s at that university.

As discussed in chapter 6, while SASCO was not in the majority in the UP SRC, Maimela notes that the university leadership realised that only white representatives were represented in the formal university structures, so they were open to hearing black students’ views and clearly listened with intent. This account illustrates that for the student voice to be heard, somebody must listen. In order for the grievances of a constituency to be addressed, those in authority must be responsive, lead and be accountable. Maimela’s reflections suggest that the wisdom of leadership may require wider consultation – not to undermine an SRC but to ensure that the full diversity of views, even of a minority, is taken into account.

Some university leaders in the narratives appear to be quite receptive to students’ views, while others seemed uninvolved. The examples about the different leadership styles of successive vice-chancellors from the same university are illustrative of the impact of personality on leadership style as perceived by a student leader. When Zuki Mqolomba was SRC president of UCT in 2006/07, the then vice-chancellor was Professor Njabulo Ndebele, whom she describes as a gentle and generous intellectual, but not someone who would support her SRC’s fervent pursuit of a transformation agenda:

To be honest our vice-chancellor at that time was hands off; Ndebele was not a hands-on, actively engaged vice-chancellor, pursuing an agenda or a campaign on campus. He was an administrator. He was an intellectual and I respected the fact that he was intelligent. He wrote books and engaged in the public, but he wasn’t a hands-on governor on campus. That was my critique of him – that he didn’t push the transformation agenda hard enough. He was too gentle, he was kind, he was generous. But he wasn’t hands-on. (Mqolomba, chapter 8)

When asked about his 2012/13 SRC’s interaction with the senior university leadership, Hallendorff gives an account of a much more direct, hands-on approach.
On the whole it was a good relationship. I met with the vice-chancellor at least once a month in his office. Dr Price had an open-door policy towards the SRC and was readily available over email or phone if needed. He was very good about making himself accessible … Overall, I enjoyed a very good relationship with Dr Price. Any disagreement was strictly professional. He was always very willing to consider differing points of view and he genuinely wanted to achieve outcomes that would be best for UCT students. (Hallendorff, chapter 10)

If good university leadership involves critically constructive, perhaps generous and gentle ways of listening to student voices to seek a common ground, the opposite is also evident in the variety of student leaders’ experiences. As the former student leaders show, leadership approaches and attitudes towards student leadership within universities can differ widely. Xolani Zuma, former SRC president of the University of Zululand, adds his views with respect to senior Student Affairs professionals:

It depends on who is dean at the time. You will find some dean of students who is receptive and willing to listen, and some who would be very dismissive. And they will tell you: ‘Look, there is nothing you can change here. These things have been like this for many years. You can’t just come here and change things overnight. Your purpose is to go and study. So, stop causing havoc unnecessarily.’ (Zuma, chapter 7)

Zuma also recalls the abuse of power he perceived by university authorities, threatening his expulsion for organising students and taking the university to task over core issues of teaching and learning quality (for details, see chapter 7).

I remember that at some point there was a gentleman who was heading security at the time who called me into his office and he said, ‘Mr Zuma, look, I have your transcript here. I have your academic results. First year, you are doing so well, you are getting 80 per cent and 70 per cent, and since you joined the student activism, with your politics and your faculty councils, they have dropped. We are warning you, stop these things, or otherwise you are going to leave this university without a degree. And you are likely to be expelled.’ These are things that were said. And I said, ‘I know that it is not you that is saying these things. Who has sent you to tell me these things? And he said, ‘Management is not happy, both at the faculty level, but also at the senior management level, with the manner in which you are conducting yourself.’ (Zuma, chapter 7)

While this account may be interpreted as a friendly warning not to neglect his studies, for Zuma the fact that the message was brought to him by the head of security, and the add-on that ‘management is not happy with the manner you are
conducting yourself” clearly did not feel like the former, but rather like a threat. Madlala also reflects on the attitude of university leaders, as well as the leadership of Student Affairs, towards student leadership:

It’s not only in Mangosuthu University of Technology. When I speak about attention to detail, I mean first of all the attitude of management in most cases towards student leaders is not a positive attitude. So, whatever they raise, is normally met with resistance – uncalculated resistance – because student activists, if they are properly orientated, they create work for management. A lot of work … And if you are a lazy person, you are not going to want to do that. So the easiest way out is to say, it cannot be done. (Madlala, chapter 9)

If a negative and dismissive attitude provides one kind of example, Madlala’s reflections in chapter 9 illustrate cases where management members deliberately misinformed a Council, or took credit for a student initiative. As Madlala argues: ‘I’m telling you, most Student Affairs departments survive on ideas of students who unfortunately cannot copyright their ideas’ (chapter 9).

Another counterpoint to the more positive experiences recalled by some is Sokhaba’s reflection of the UWC SRC’s role in ‘the battle of the two Brians’. At the time, Sokhaba was serving his first term in the UWC SRC and found himself at the margins of a battle between the then chair of Council, Brian Williams, and UWC’s long-serving vice-chancellor, Brian O’Connell and his deputy. Why did the SRC executive stand so staunchly behind Williams? Sokhaba reflects in chapter 12:

Where the turning point came consciously to me was when I started understanding that I do not realise the struggle we are in now. Probably because I did not understand the background workings; what actually motivates us here to even go to an extent of wanting to have the rector leave … Now this is one of the issues that were raised to me by the comrades from the YCL saying: ‘We are pretty much sure that you don’t know that one of the motivations out there which is being said is that these comrades are taking bribes and you are getting nothing’. (Sokhaba, chapter 12)

While this is the only example of a speculation by a former student leader in this book that others in the SRC had been bribed to take certain positions – in this case, to the extreme of trying to force a vice-chancellor out – it is not the first such accusation to appear.

The relationship between university managements and student leaders is clearly often a very fraught one, and begs the question of what constitutes a healthy relationship between university leadership (and by extension the senior student affairs professionals) on the one hand, and student leaders on the other hand. Whose responsibility is it to ensure that there is a healthy relationship characterised
by mutual respect and tolerance, year after year, with successive generations of student leaders? Certainly, this is a hard task; but it cannot be acceptable for a university leadership to abrogate responsibility for protests and argue that the reality of perennial student protests is ‘students’ culture on this campus’.

As September has argued, the threat of student protests, and actual protesting, are mostly the outcomes of a lack of timely, and appropriate leadership responses to student grievances. Certainly, it depends on the issue involved, but his view is that it was ‘often the combination of advocating in structures and protests that was more impactful’ (chapter 4). While some students may experience a good march as fun (as Khati’s account shows), and while there may be reasons for protests that are not quite as genuine as others (as shown in Bafo’s chapter and others), responsive leadership could assist in providing alternative forms of entertainment and channelling partisan competition into less divisive forms.

Despite some of the accounts that provide negative views of university managements, others portray a different, and more mutually respectful and constructive relationship between student leaders and senior university leaders in general, and vice-chancellors in particular. As Sikhakhane’s reflections from the early 1990s show, when the potential for adversarial relationships was at its height, there was a certain humility and understanding that mutual respect was essential for the powder keg not to ignite. Sikhakhane recalls:

We were able to engage management meaningfully, and the entire student leadership. There would always be people who didn’t see eye to eye with the management, and there were those who didn’t agree with us, but they treated us with respect. I still remember Judge Carol Lewis, who is now a judge in the Supreme Court, and I had to appear before her all the time. We differed sharply, but one thing we did was engage with each other, and that was important. She was very good at that level, and when she differed with us, she would call us to a debate. There were others we never had a relationship with, those who humiliated students in those engagements. There were a couple of them, and students didn’t have a good relationship with some people … But the vice-chancellor, Bob Charlton, I found that engaging with him as a human being was more meaningful than my engagement with some of the people who boasted they have been liberals before. I found that as a human being, he was much more sincere to deal with than some professors who I found to be more prejudiced than they imagined. There is always a contradiction between what students want and what management wants – it is never going to be smooth – but I think we were able to manage that relationship. (Sikhakhane, chapter 2)

If it was possible then to ‘bridge the gaps’ and ‘manage that relationship’, how may we be able to move forward today with the governance of higher education
almost a quarter of a century later and having amassed a wealth of experience and knowledge on what works and what doesn’t, to guide us?

How to move forward with co-operative governance

When the White Paper of 1997 and the HE Act came into force and co-operative governance began to be ‘implemented’ in the universities across the country, a saying made the rounds among student leaders: co-operative governance means, ‘We govern, you co-operate.’ The ‘we’ referred to senior university leaders and the ‘you’ to student leaders. As Naidoo’s reflections illustrate, there was already scepticism towards the co-operative governance model in the student movement when it was first proposed; and the attitudes of senior academics and university leadership that she encountered towards student leadership were mixed at best. The reflections of others, such as September, Bafo, Mqolomba, Zuma and Maimela, also show that student leaders had vastly different institutional experiences when trying to carry out their roles and to make student representation work. Unequal institutional conditions have persisted throughout the decades, and the process of mergers and incorporations in the mid-2000s in some cases even exacerbated governance problems, along with the marginalisation of student voices in some institutions.

At the outset of this chapter we referred to the CHE’s landmark review of higher education in 20 years of democracy published in 2016. Part of this work is an analysis of higher education governance conducted by a task team led by the former chair of the NCHE, Prof. Jairam Reddy. The task team’s review provides a periodisation of higher education governance under democracy and a sustained account of how the initial hope for a democratisation of institutional-level governance (1994 to 2000) gave way to a rise of managerialism (2001 to 2009) and eventually to ever-more widespread institutional crises of various kinds (2009 to 2014).76 While the historically advantaged and metropolitan universities had had various problems to contend with, it was in the historically disadvantaged universities, especially the rural and peri-urban ones, and in some cases in components of the mergers, that governance failures were of such a nature that assessors and/or administrators had to be appointed, the latter taking over the functions of Council and/or the vice-chancellor.77 Among the key causes of governance failure at Council level and beyond identified in that review were factionalism and the ‘stakeholderisation’ of governance. It argued:

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Unions, students, and in some institutions convocations, sitting in Council seem to be unable to understand that their role is not that of stakeholder representatives. This trend, together with institutional circumstances, means that councils can be and, in effect are, often unable to fulfil their fiduciary role.\(^7^8\)

Among the reasons it advanced for the ‘stakeholderisation’ in councils were dysfunctional and ineffective institutional forums – which had precisely been designed as forums for stakeholder delegates to negotiate compromises – as well as various forms of factionalism, partisanship, and low-level corruption affecting governance.\(^7^9\) A related point was the finding that academics and students were the ‘two fundamental casualties’ of managerialism. With respect to students in particular, it argued:

> Students, despite noises about student-centeredness, have in the managerialist conception typically been reduced to being clients of the university, thus often replacing pedagogy with edutainment, the normative nature of education with marketing and communication campaigns, and their role in university governance to acting as sounding boards on user committees.\(^8^0\)

The CHE task team then proposed ‘a post-managerialist system of decision-making and accountability’ which it characterised as a form of knowledge-based management of, and for, transformation. Among the features of such a post-managerialist governance, leadership and management system, it proposed that:

> Re-centering academics and students as the heart of the academic enterprise will not only increase the knowledge available at the centre and re-insert fundamentally critical voices into the management discourse, it might also help to give effect to a ‘thick’ notion of academic freedom in which students’ rights to quality education is included.\(^8^1\)

The CHE task team sought to translate these arguments into practice by proposing a form of transformative and distributed leadership within a context where a resuscitated Senate would return to the heart of institutional governance, in keeping with academic rule as a practice of academic freedom. Furthermore, it argued

> it is important to reflect on the role of student leadership as custodian of the student interest and how statutory representation of students in Council,

\(^7^8\) Ibid., p. 129.  
\(^7^9\) Ibid.  
\(^8^0\) Ibid., pp. 133–134.  
\(^8^1\) Ibid., p. 134.
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Senate, Institutional Forum, Student Services Council and, last but not least, the SRC itself, can give effect to a conception of students not as clients, but as members of the academic community, partners in their education and co-producers of knowledge.  

The reflections of the former student leaders in this book provide some material to elaborate on the points raised by the CHE task team, which resonate well with some of the experiences described by them. Thus, to conclude we will take them in turn: the principled matters raised in terms of academic freedom, academic rule and the way students’ role is conceived in governance; the matter of the structural relations between governance bodies; and the role and functioning of the SRC.

Living the principles of co-operative governance

The new model of co-operative governance proposed by the NCHE and adopted with some modifications by means of the White Paper and HE Act, envisioned the democratisation of existing structures and the establishment of new structures of governance at national and institutional levels, as well as the inclusion of previously excluded groups in the governing bodies of higher education. ‘Democratisation’ was to be the principle applicable to a transformed governance system:

The principle of democratisation requires that governance of the system of higher education and of individual institutions should be democratic, representative and participatory and characterised by mutual respect, tolerance and the maintenance of a well-ordered and peaceful community life. Structures and procedures should ensure that those affected by decisions have a say in making them, either directly or through elected representatives. It requires that decision-making processes at the systemic, institutional and departmental levels are transparent, and that those taking and implementing decisions are accountable for the manner in which they perform their duties and use resources.  

The starting point for the revival of ‘a well-ordered and peaceful’ university community is a renewed commitment to a democratisation of governance. Integral to this is the idea of equality – everyone’s vote counts equally, everyone’s voice deserves to be heard. Hence the need for mutual respect and tolerance in the interaction between different constituent groups, and the requirement that ‘those affected by decisions have a say in making them’. Living the principle of democratisation in higher education governance would require moving a step on

82 Ibid.
from the prevailing managerialism diagnosed by the CHE task team, towards a recentring on academics and students and the less hierarchical system of governance desired by Naidoo and others. As Naidoo notes:

> From the #October6 group came the slogan ‘Towards a public African decolonised university’ and the discussions around decolonisation included structures of governance and the need to imagine a very different system of working together that doesn’t reproduce hierarchies. (Naidoo, chapter 3)

**Making student governance work – at all levels**

With respect to student leadership and representation, a multidimensional approach towards levelling the governance arena and creating a governance system that is ‘democratic, representative and participatory’ could start by helping students to develop a comprehensive system of student governance. Madlala’s reflections in chapter 9 on how to improve student representation are particularly insightful in this respect, given the breadth and recent nature of his student leadership experience and his current role as chair of Convocation at MUT.

> When I came in as president of the SRC I already knew what I would like to change. The first project I wanted to have was to launch structures of the SRC to properly constitute student governance. Student governance is not the SRC; it is all the structures that are involved in the governance of that particular university. So, I wanted to get residence sub-committees in place; I wanted to get the faculty reps which would then be responsible for ensuring that the class reps are functioning accordingly; get everyone in place and then hold a workshop. We wanted to form a booklet and workshop with these people on their responsibilities. Train the class reps so that they know what their role is. (Madlala, chapter 9)

A comprehensive system of student governance thus involves well-functioning structures across all sectors of student life, but particularly with respect to academic life in and out of classrooms, departments and faculties, and life in and out of residences, on and off campus. Similarly, Zuma (in chapter 7) speaks of the importance of having class representative systems and faculty councils in place for students to play a meaningful role in the governance, delivery and quality of teaching and learning.

Yet it is not sufficient to get the structures established and functional; the university community in general, and students in particular, must also understand the roles of the different structures, and who plays those roles.

> If you go to a faculty, there must be a picture of a faculty representative there. Students must know, if you go to residence whatever, there must a picture
of a student who’s a representative with their contact details. The student population must know who their first point of contact is, so that it is not only the SRC that has got calendars in the entire university. But you expect students to go to a class rep; some don’t even know who their class rep is.

Your dean must know, here is the faculty rep, here is the person you will be liaising with. The head of Student Affairs must know here is the chairperson of the housing committee, the head of sport. If you do that within the first month or two, you have got your governance in order. You then are able as the SRC to focus on certain things and monitor the functionality of this governance to ensure that it really performs. (Madlala, chapter 9)

The need for training

Putting in place a functioning student governance system cannot be done by student leadership alone. Student leadership development and student governance support are typical functions of Student Affairs departments. When Madlala was asked if such support had been available to him, he said: ‘No, they are not doing it. And unfortunately, sometimes these deans of students, these people, they interfere with SRC things’ (chapter 9). Moreover, in his view, training an SRC, or residence committees, faculty councils and class representatives, involves much more than what is typically offered. He comments:

As an SRC, you go for an inauguration training; they call it SRC induction. What it does is that you just get different heads of departments coming to communicate to you what they do. Someone will first tell you the vision of the institution and all those big plans, and then you get someone who will come and tell you about what Student Affairs and these departments do.

But I don’t feel that this is a training. Because in a training on what it is to be an SRC, you should be getting a two- or a three-day training, where you get an expert in the area of leadership or whatever the case is, coming to make presentations to you, coming to tell you about time management, how you juggle your studies and this; emotional intelligence; how to deal with problems of people here; students who have been raped, have got AIDS – come to the SRC office … how do you deal with that? … Negotiation skills; basic skills. They expect us to sit with management and their departments and everyone there, and negotiate on fees or whatever the case is. But no one ever comes there and says: ‘Here are negotiations skills.’ (Madlala, chapter 9)

Although Madlala is talking about only a few days of training, ideally student leadership development and training courses should be conducted across the term and target not only incumbent student leaders at various levels, but also aspiring ones, in order to nurture a new cadre of student leadership. Some institutions do already offer in-depth and ongoing training, mentoring and supervision, while
others offer only a few days of induction. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that there remains a lot of inequality (or ‘differentiation’) amongst institutions and Madlala’s experience may not be as typical and generalisable as it is made out to be. The general point is that all institutions ought to be resourced to a point where they have the capabilities to conduct such training and equip student leaders to participate effectively. After all, universities are amongst the most complex social institutions in existence and to be able to participate effectively in their decision-making mechanisms requires a lot of learning. Moreover, the lessons learnt in student leadership are truly life-lessons (as shown in the reflections of student leaders on the biographical impact of their experience).

Providing administrative support
Several former student leaders also commented on the pivotal role played by SRC administrators. For instance, Bafo (chapter 5) recalls:

And there was a lady there by the name Nondumiso. She worked for Student Affairs but since left UWC and went to work for HESA. At the time she was also a SASCO member but employed by the institution as the head of SRC admin. So management knew that we thought that she was suspect and of course wanted to have our own admin.

[But] I refused to fire Nondumiso. She was working as an admin person and she had all the institutional knowledge. Apart from that, here was someone that was renting a flat with a two year old and for me to say she must be fired, or removed somewhere else, what would I be gaining from doing that?

After we were elected into the SRC, we did not have the official handover from SASCO members because they were bitter about the elections; it’s normal … We inherited a structure where there were no inventories, nothing. The computers were wiped; everything was cleaned, nothing. And the only person who was there to guide us, was the very same person PASMA members were saying I must fire, Nomdumiso from Student Affairs. And the argument was that we had nothing except this person to guide us through the process. (Bafo, chapter 5)

Madlala also reflects on the importance of Student Affairs’ support for an SRC in helping with administrative processes and logistical matters. In addition, he argues that good support also impacts positively on student leaders’ academic progress.

We had one person from Student Affairs as administrative assistance. They did all of that, except the minutes which were the responsibility of the [SRC] secretary. What this person used to do is basically everything. If we wanted transport, we would requisition it and give it over to her, for her to process
But we understood also that there was only so much that she would be able to do.

But part of that, I think administrative support is very important because it feeds into the success rate of SRC members in terms of their academic work. Because if they have not got sufficient support structures, they do all these things and then they end up lacking on their academic work. And the only thing the country does is cry that ‘SRCs stay for long and they don’t graduate’. (Madlala, chapter 9)

**Structural interrelations, student representation in institutional governance**

In her chapter, Khati proposes a number of matters that would improve student representation. Top on her agenda is speeding up the decision-making processes in university governance and making them more accessible to students: ‘Definitely I would want the decision processes to be fast-tracked. I don’t have a formula now, but it must be fast-tracked.’ Khati also thinks that making student parliament a statutory student governance structure, and having management representation on it, would be an improvement.

I think one thing that could help is if the rector could also have a seat in student parliament and maybe come once a term to account to students. And maybe for the Higher Education Act to also recognise student parliament as a legit body where students can raise issues. (Khati, chapter 13)

What Khati has in mind is for student parliament to be taken seriously enough for the vice-chancellor of the university (who is also the chair of the Senate) to ‘have a seat’ on it and account to it. While this may sound like an outlandish proposition, it resonates well with the CHE task team’s finding on the importance of high-level linkages between governance structures. With respect to the Institutional Forum, that study found:

If, as the legislation proposed, the role of the IF was to gather stakeholder views of the variety of matters that constituted the purview of this structure to advise Council on, the failure of the IFs could result, and indeed it did in many cases, in growing factionalism of councils. There are few cases in which IFs have performed their role effectively and, in some of these, it seems that the fact that the chair (or co-chair) of the IF was occupied by a senior member of the university ensured the existence of a productive link with council.84

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Let students lead

While there are many examples of ways in which student representation could be improved and effect be given to a more meaningful and constructive role of student leadership in higher education governance, an insight that can be derived from the reflections of the former student leaders is that institutional conditions are various, and relevant solutions are best found co-operatively at that level. To move forward will require new partnerships, imagination and courage. Can students be trusted to lead such a process? Sikhakhane and Naidoo argue that one of the most important contributions of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall was intellectual: that they opened up a new discursive space to chart new ways of thinking and doing, with notions like decoloniality and the call for free, decolonised higher education. In Sikhakhane's words:

I think the essence of student activism – what makes it – is its honesty and independence … And I think students [should] truly, every day – as they did with the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall – continue to help us, because that is their road: to intellectually lead us into areas we fear thinking about … To ignite us to think courageously about things we have become lethargic about, and things we have learnt to accept – even if they are wrong … All of us tend to be aligned with certain things that are set. Only students can do that for us, because they have the courage to defy the accepted narratives in society. Only students tend to force society to think critically, even about those idols we have created. (Sikhakhane, chapter 2)

The narratives from student leaders in this book have documented a number of different journeys. In the first instance, the immediacy of each student leader’s personal growth through experience and having to face the challenges of student life and leadership in often very testing conditions shines through in their first-person stories. At the same time, there is a journey across time as the analysis traverses different generations of student leaders, emerging and consolidating legislative contexts, and the vagaries of political and economic conditions. This chapter has sought to reflect some of these continuities and discontinuities, highlighting specific insights that may help in shaping student leadership in the future and provide material for national and institutional policy development and improved governance practice. But most of all, the individual reflections have allowed a glimpse into the lived realities of a dozen student leaders who share a passion and a commitment to the service of others who, like them, have embarked on a higher education journey in search of a brighter future.