

## 10-year review of Africa's first student surgical society – UCT Surgical Society



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The UCT Student Surgical Society is an undergraduate surgical society based at the University of Cape Town (UCT) which aims to promote surgical education amongst medical students early in their medical careers. Founded in 2006, this was Africa's first student surgical society and has been joined by other medical schools in Africa also establishing their own undergraduate student surgical societies. In this review of the first 10 years of the society, we describe its objectives, its evolution and its international role.

### The History of the Society

In 2006, six fourth-year medical students at UCT aimed to replicate the student-led surgical societies at medical schools in the United Kingdom. The latter were established as part of the Royal College of Surgeons of England's educational outreach initiative to offer extracurricular surgical lecture series and clinical exposure to bridge the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate surgical programmes.<sup>1,2,3</sup> With the support of Professor Delawir Kahn, the Head of the Department of Surgery and a keen mentor to undergraduate students, the society held its first meeting.

**Table 1. Aims and objectives**

1. To promote surgical education amongst students and stimulate interest in the field of surgery.
2. To promote a culture of surgical research amongst students.
3. To expose students to leaders in the field of surgery.
4. To expose students to the latest surgical innovations.
5. To provide a stimulus for a career in surgery.
6. To create partnerships with other surgical societies throughout the world.

### The Society over the last 10 years

The Society is run by a committee of undergraduate medical students ranging from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> year. The committee members each take on a portfolio to drive the running of the society and its activities. Serving actively in the society is a means to

bolster the CV of students already wishing to pursue a surgical career. The society and various committee members have won various awards over the years (Table 2).

**Table 2: Awards**

Most Outstanding Society 2012-2015	UCT Surgical Society	UCT Department of Student Affairs
UCT Team of the Year 2015, 2016	UCT Surgical Society	UCT Department of Student Affairs
Rhodes Scholarship 2014	Tinashe Chandauka	President - 2014
Kerry Capstick-Dale Leadership Award 2015	Danielle Ferrar	President 2015
UCT Leadership Excellence Award 2015	Danielle Ferrar	President 2015
UCT Deputy Vice Chancellor's Award 2015	Amy Booth	President 2017

The executive committee is composed of older students who have served actively in the society for several years and form the main leadership of the society. Important executive positions in the society are:

#### **President and two Vice-Presidents**

While the president is responsible for the running of the society one vice president is in charge of external duties, maintaining all relations outside of the University of Cape Town community, notably with the Southern African Students' Surgical Society (SASSS) and International Association of Student Surgical Societies (IASSS), while the other is in charge of relations with the various UCT departments.

#### **Secretary and Treasurer**

These are two administrative roles for the management tasks of the committee. The secretary is in charge of record-keeping and society correspondence while the treasurer maintains the accounts of the society.

### **Anatomy portfolio**

Anatomy forms a foundation of postgraduate surgical training and the workshops provided to our members are of the most popular events. The portfolio aims to bring clinically relevant anatomy, taught by a specialist surgeon, to students outside of their undergraduate curriculum. These workshops are streamed digitally to increase their educational reach. The society runs four to six anatomy workshops per year covering neuro, cardiac, abdominal and musculoskeletal anatomy. These workshops provide students with a chance to obtain more hands-on dissection exposure with a surgically relevant approach as compared to the purely scientific approach taught in the core basic sciences.

### **Surgical skills portfolio**

The surgical skills portfolio provides students with the opportunity to expand and perfect their surgical skills by arranging time in the university surgical skills lab. Utilizing the medical school's state of the art modern day skills laboratory, the society hosts basic and advanced surgical skills, orthopedic and trauma workshops for our members. There are also undergraduate basic laparoscopy skills workshops aimed at undergraduate students.

Since 2011 an annual surgical competition 'Top Knife' has been held to see who from the society has the best surgical knowledge and skillset. The competition has grown in popularity, quality and competition amongst its participants. The Department of Surgery officially certifies these courses and provides attendees with a completion certificate.

*Research portfolio* This portfolio connects students with surgeons allowing students to get involved in research. In 2014, UCT joined Acamedics,<sup>4</sup> an international non-profit organization run by doctors which helps medical students to collaborate on international research projects.

### **Sponsorship portfolio**

Sponsorship and membership fees are the two sources of income for the society. This portfolio aims to help secure funding for the various activities offered by the society.

### **Outreach portfolio**

The outreach portfolio runs various projects which aim to give back to the community. In 2013, the society collaborated with Operation Smile, an organization which treats children with cleft palates in third world countries, and two society members participated as medical volunteers. In 2015, the society partnered with Cederberg wine farms and provides an annual mobile clinic screening their workers for any chronic illnesses.

### **Public relations portfolio**

With the growth of the society, the *public relations portfolio* was added in 2015. This encompasses all social media activity and the running of 'non-academic' events such as the annual *Student vs Surgeon Golf Day*.

### **Formation of the South African Students' Surgical Societies (SASSS) and International Association of Student Surgical Societies (IASSS)**

With the firm establishment of the society within the UCT medical school, the committee members sought to expand this experience to other universities around Southern Africa. This led to the formation of the Southern African Students' Surgical Societies (SASSS). The SASSS held its inaugural surgical symposium in July 2013 at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS). The aim of the SASSS is to provide a platform for undergraduate medical students to share their surgical knowledge and experiences and a hub for collaborative surgical research. In 2013, this was expanded and the International Association of Student Surgical Societies (IASSS) was formed.

### **The Future**

From a small start in 2006 to becoming one of the most well known societies at UCT, the society now has a well-established constitution and position in the university. With the continued support and collaboration from the Department of Surgery, the society will continue to grow filling a vital place in undergraduate surgical education, research and skills to produce a new generation of aspiring modern day surgeons.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **REFERENCES**

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