

# Internationalisation and Higher Education Development in South Africa A focus on SHAWCO at the University of Cape Town, and its Social Responsiveness Programme

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## Background

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) strategic plan for 2009-2013, recently tabled at senate, characterises Vice-Chancellor Max Price's first term of office. The plan takes as a given that the core business of the institution, i.e. research, teaching, and learning, will continue and that most of this activity is being conducted very successfully and at a very high level. Thus, the strategic plan that he presented for this period focuses on the change UCT needs to introduce.

In an attempt to flesh out what change UCT would like to see achieved, and be visible, in the UCT of 2013, the focus of the strategic plan is on how to promote what is distinctive about UCT in the higher education landscape.

### These are:

- UCT's particular responsibility to produce the next generation of academics for South Africa and the continent;
- UCT's tradition of commitment to social justice and democratic values, and its desire to foreground this through its research, the values of its graduates and its social responsiveness activities; and
- UCT's leading position on the African continent and the possibility of becoming a global meeting point between North and South.

### In addition, the strategic plan addresses the questions:

- What would make UCT the preferred place – the destination of choice - for students, young post-doctoral and senior academics in South Africa, Africa and internationally?
- How can UCT adjust its activities to better answer the pressing social, economic, and developmental problems facing South Africa and the African continent?

This article foregrounds the role of one of the organisations at UCT that has a long history of addressing some of the overarching strategic goals mentioned above. Over a period of 65 years, the Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation (SHAWCO) has proved to be a strategic mechanism for achieving some of UCT's social responsibility goals through its outreach work involving strategic partnerships with local communities of Cape Town, UCT departments, corporate organisations, student organisations, and international partner universities. One of UCT's overarching strategic goals is to enhance and strengthen its engagement and relationship with the various communities of Cape Town that were historically excluded from UCT. The University is regarded by many in the city as a place that is either beyond their reach or too inhospitable. If it is to transform itself into an inclusive space of learning and teaching, it has to change these perceptions. Expanding outreach work, social responsiveness activities in these communities, public relations, improved school liaison, and highlighting the achievements of alumni from these communities, are the hallmarks of SHAWCO's mission.

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## Success Factors

SHAWCO's success factors lie in ensuring that its goals are met within the constraints of trying to "achieve long term goals with short term volunteers".

Through SHAWCO's programmes such as SHAWCO Education, SHAWCO Health, SHAWCO Enterprise, and SHAWCO International, the organisation has succeeded in expanding opportunities for students to become involved in community-based programmes and thereby assisting in dealing with some of the key development challenges facing our society. South Africa faces a number of critical threats to the success of its development. These include continued high levels of poverty and inequality, violent crime, poor quality of education in most of our public schools, the lack of infrastructure development, rapid urbanization, preventable diseases, and others. Through direct experience, students registered at UCT for full degrees and semester study, as well as those overseas students who come for service learning programmes, are able to acquire the civic literacy knowledge and skills necessary to build a more just, equitable, and unified society not only here in South Africa but also in their home countries.

By participating in SHAWCO's programmes based at centres right across the Cape Peninsula, UCT is able to contribute to social reconstruction and development through creating opportunities for student engagement. This is an important vehicle for interdisciplinary learning, enhancing the breadth and diversity of the students' educational experience and producing graduate citizens able to reflect on the implications of living and working in different social contexts. Most importantly, it equips young people with the skills and the knowledge to address social issues and, at the same time, keep them sustainable.

SHAWCO calls them the "humming birds", the ones that don't easily give up and keep on building nests in the face of hopelessness.

The experiences that result from this exposure are life changing.

## SHAWCO Education

SHAWCO Education has been providing extra lessons in Mathematics, Science, English, and Biology to learners in Cape Town townships for the past five years. There are about 1300

learners per year who benefit from this programme in some of the most impoverished areas on the Cape flats such as Khayelitsha, Nyanga, Kensington, and Mannenberg. About 80 student committee members and 800 volunteers plan and implement the tutoring, sports, arts, life skills, and educational trips that form part of the curriculum. In total, SHAWCO attracts about 1400 volunteers a year, with 880 in the education sector whose aim is to improve the academic performance of learners in township schools and improve their chances of getting access to higher education. SHAWCO Education is already bearing fruit in that some of the learners on the programme are getting enrolled at UCT, funded by SHAWCO, and also enrolling in other Western Cape higher education institutions.

## SHAWCO Health

The Health sector has some 500 students from the Faculty of Health Sciences who take three specially equipped mobile clinics to various sites in the evenings, and treat between 4000 and 6000 patients per year. Over 160 clinics are run every year in Khayelitsha, New Nest, Browns Farm, Masiphumelele and Jo Slovo. Special Paediatric Clinics and screening clinics are run at Imizamo Yethu in Hout Bay, as well as at Children's Homes. Health and Rehabilitation services are also provided at these clinics. The patients who attend Simthandile Clinic on Monday nights now have access to a medical clinic, waiting room education, sign language interpretation, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and audiology services. These clinics also offer dietetics and nutrition services by students from the University of the Western Cape who are studying Public Health. The SHAWCO Health Clinic at Khayelitsha, with funding from GrandWest, is a true mobile Paediatric clinic, which visits Edu-care Centres, pre-schools, crèches, and children's homes to screen a large number of children in the hope that children at risk can be identified before they have to be taken to hospital. The clinic is in partnership with the UCT Faculty of Health Sciences and the work there forms part of the Paediatrics curriculum for medical students as well as other students from the Health and Rehabilitation Sciences who do the screening in areas such as neurodevelopment, audiology, speech and language pathology as well as assist school teachers and principals in issues of environmental health. The clinic operates during the week and on Saturdays. Services will soon include a Paediatric Cerebral Palsy Clinic on Saturday mornings. All these services at clinics are helping ease the pressure at the Red Cross Children's Hospital and at outpatient hospitals in the Western Cape.

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### Local, Corporate and International Partnerships

These programmes have been made possible through the many partnerships that SHAWCO has forged both locally and internationally. Corporate support includes that from the Grand West Casino, MWeb, MTN Foundation, FNB Trust, Murray and Roberts, Anglo American Chairman’s Fund, Bombardier, Western Province Rugby - all as a part of their corporate social investment (CSI). RAG (Remember and Give) is a sister organisation of SHAWCO comprising of 80 student volunteers who raise about R1 million per year from events such as music shows, selling the SAX Appeal magazine and holding auctions.

Through the support and partnership with the Faculty of Health Sciences, SHAWCO has been able to run the clinics through the participation of students and volunteer doctors. Through a generous donation from the MTN Foundation, secured by the student leaders themselves, computers at SHAWCO’s Nyanga Centre are now all connected to the Internet. This has enabled participants in the Masizikhulise Project to access key information regarding job opportunities, key business practices and a host of other information. A new computer centre at Mannenberg, with full Internet connection, is now completed through a partnership between Mannenberg Primary School, SHAWCO and various stakeholders in the community, as well as the generous funding support from the Ernest E. and Brendalyn Stempel Foundation, and the Rhodes Scholarship Southern African Fund (RSSAF). These computers will be used by the school during the day, by SHAWCO in the afternoon for tutoring projects, and by community members in the evening when adult computer classes are run.

The International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO) suggested that SHAWCO approach international partner universities, many of whom are often interested in sending their students here for service learning or for electives. The Director of SHAWCO wasted no time in pursuing this proposition and currently SHAWCO has a number of international partnerships that help keep SHAWCO’s programmes running through UCT’s vacation periods. SHAWCO has hosted groups of student volunteers from Amiens in France, Oslo College and Oslo University in Norway, Stanford University in the US, the College of William and Mary in the US, Vanderbilt University in the US, Arcadia University in the US, Sheffield University in the UK (the latter on their fourth visit), and medical students from the University of New South Wales who will be manning the mobile clinics during UCT’s vacation periods while earning credits for their elective. SHAWCO is continuing to explore other partnerships in order to continue offering continuous services to the community. These may be from universities abroad, local corporations, individuals and Foundations.

As the largest student run organisation in the Southern Hemisphere, SHAWCO is just one example of a campus-based organisation that is having a huge impact on South African society, particularly in the greater Cape Town area. The students who volunteer are the key players without whom none of this could be achieved. SHAWCO provides a platform that is successfully being used by higher education to impact the communities in which they are located and beyond. SHAWCO has become instrumental in promoting some of UCT’s global partnerships and has made student volunteerism a global movement. The organisation plays a part in enabling local and external communities and NGOs to access knowledge, skills, resources and professional expertise.

One of the challenges that SHAWCO has is to keep its operations and volunteer services running when the student volunteers are on vacation.

Other South African higher education institutions can emulate this model as a way of engaging with the communities around them.



Students from the UCT Faculty of Health, equipped with three mobile clinics, treat between 4000 and 6000 patients per year.

